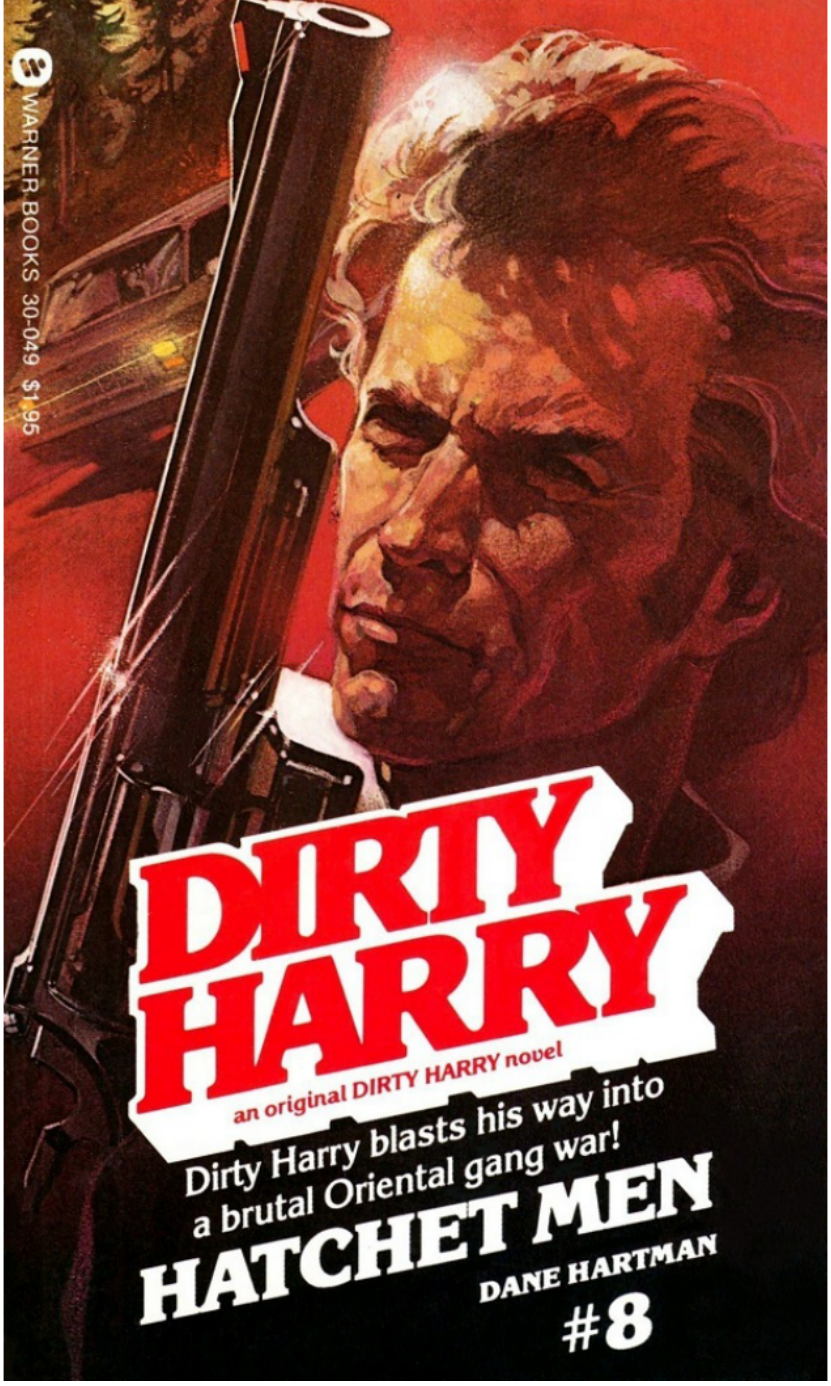
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HATCHET MEN
DANE HARTMAN
#8

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Inagaki grew absolutely livid, his whole body quaking. “You may have destroyed the Kozure Ronin!” he shouted, “but you will not save Suni! I will slit her throat right before your eyes!”

Harry’s finger was already depressing the Nambu’s trigger when he saw Suni’s eyes and mouth snap open. She quickly grabbed her brother’s sword hand and sank her teeth into it. Tetsuya screamed, dropped the blade and reared up. For a second, Harry had the man dead to rights, caught smack dab in the middle of a 9mm gun barrel across a bedroom.

But at the last possible second, he pulled the gun up, unfired.

Inagaki stared bulging eyed at him for a split second before making his move . . .

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DIRTY HARRY #8

Hatchet Men

Dane Hartman

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DEDICATION

To Christopher Kelly Browne,
who has the soul of a teddy bear
but the mind of a grizzly.

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For Larry Hama of *Crazy Magazine,* who warned and informed me.
For F. Jacques von Schneden and his brother, who packs a .357.
For Kevin Kelleher, a.k.a. Mort Duck, the Phantom of San Francisco.
For John Butler of Hansen & Co., Gunsmiths, who smiled patiently.
For Anthony F. Slez, Jr. and family.
For Barbara, Chris, and all the other dark mysteries.
For Melissa, the light at the end of the tunnel.

DIRTY HARRY #8

HATCHET MEN

CHAPTER

One

By all rights, Jay Kuong Chien should have died with the rest of them. When the Japanese kid came into his uncle's store and pulled the VZ61 machine pistol out from under his coat, Jay should have been sitting on the stack of Chinese comic books next to the curtained door on the back wall. If he had, it was certain that he would have been killed with his uncle and the one store patron in the first sweep of the gun's ten 7:65mm bullets.

As it was, the ten-inch Czechoslovakian auto-pistol spit out the rounds in little more than a second, three hunks of lead perforating the owner's chest as he stood on the platform in the middle of the right-hand wall, five bullets stitching across the periodical-lined walls, and the last two thudding into the back of a patron. Jay's uncle hopped up as the rounds punched him. He opened his mouth to shout, but his lungs gave out at the same second his legs did. He crumpled behind the cash register, his eyes still open.

The patron stepped forward, surprised, then terrified as the searing pain in his back spread throughout his trunk and he fell helplessly forward. He felt further pain as his forehead collided with a shelf on the back wall just before his entire body went numb. As he closed his eyes and died, his weight pulled the shelf down after him. He slammed belly first to the floor, a shower of Chinese magazines raining over him like a multicolored shroud.

Without pausing, the Japanese youth with the Czech gun hefted the three-pound weapon, pulling out its empty clip even before the last of its spent, ejected shells clattered off the wall behind him. He slid another full clip into place and strode quickly toward the curtained back door. Moving forward, he heard the front door swing open and jangle the hanging metal wind chime. He knew it would be another Japanese youth with another gun. They were covering the store too well for it to be anyone else.

It was a small, thin establishment filled with the stench of black newsprint and red death. On the plank lining all four walls were the latest newspapers and magazines imported from the Orient. On the wall shelves were the Chinese-language American papers as well as monthly and back-issue periodicals. Crammed in between the reading

material was blank paper, ink pots, pens, art supplies, and other gimcracks Jay's uncle thought were necessary.

These things did not concern the two Japanese boys. They headed right for the door in the left corner of the back wall. As they approached, they did not notice the wrinkled, smudged comic book atop a stack next to the curtained doorway. They had no way of knowing that this was Jay Kuong Chien's regular seat. The seat he occupied as the store's official "lookout" man.

As Jay had no way of knowing that this, of all nights, was the one when he was really needed. It was nine o'clock on a cool Monday evening in San Francisco's Chinatown. It was the slowest night of the week for the establishments that catered to the tourist crowd as well as the places that entertained the area's twenty-five thousand inhabitants. So Jay's uncle saw no harm in letting the eager, capable young man spend his last minutes on duty among the gamblers in the back. Especially since he was going out on a late date with his girl right after.

Seconds later, Jay's uncle saw nothing, period, ever again. He died with no way of signaling the men inside the smoky, dank back room. He had no electric warning system in his store, no button under his desk, no buzzer in the back. His was a small gambling operation that used Jay as a combination lookout and bouncer. He was well equipped for both roles. As a black belt in karate, working up to the second "Dan" or level of proficiency, Jay seemed to have eyes in the back of his head and limbs like greased lightning.

Blind luck had saved him from the first attack. That and his skills saved him from the second. The thick soundproofing had kept the noise of the double store murder from the ears of the intent gamblers in the back room. Jay was watching the men ply their near-professional skills around the one large table as the door behind him burst open.

He reacted instinctively. As the new hail of bullets slashed across the room, Jay Kuong Chien dropped and rolled. The door flying open was the only signal he needed. He tried to adapt to the sudden situation as he scrambled for cover.

The first Japanese youth had stuck a twenty-round clip into his VZ61 so there were more 7.65mm bullets burrowing into the walls, furnishings, and gamblers. His partner in murder was fanning the room with an Ingram MAC 11, its thirty-two 9mm bullets messing up whatever the VZ missed. Since both guns were so small, their accuracy wasn't the best, but with the wealth of targets in the small enclosure it hardly mattered. Cards, chips, coins, bills, and pegs flew toward the ceiling as several men did a macabre death dance out of their chairs,

blood gouting out of their bodies.

Those who weren't hit immediately scrambled for the one window, situated high up the back wall. It emptied out into a garbage-strewn courtyard between three buildings. The gambler who reacted the fastest got to the window first. He hesitated before the dirty, opaque beige-colored glass for a millisecond, but the weight of the desperate men scrambling behind him pushed him right through the glass. The bullets did not kill him. The long shard driving into his chest as the others barreled over him did.

The first gambler was bent double over the windowsill, a piece of glass wedged in his chest, as two others tumbled out into the small courtyard and what they thought was safety. As they leaped to their feet, they saw three blank walls and another Japanese youth standing in between them. In his arms he cradled an Israeli Uzi sub-machine gun. The Chinese on the right saw the small, vicious machine cut down his fellow just before it was turned on him. The left gambler tried to leap toward the courtyard's entrance to his left. The Uzi chattered, installing five spears of metal from his face to his waist. The 9mm shells destroyed his head and internal organs. With a horrid wrenching sound, he twisted in mid-air and fell, his blood splashing after him.

The right gambler had a choice. He could dive back into the gambling den or charge the Uzi holder. He charged. The Japanese swung the eight-pound Uzi to bear and decorated the gambler's front in crimson as he stepped casually to the side. The gambler saw the gun buck as a gigantic invisible hand clamped down on his insides. Then a wet, hard fist smashed into his face and he felt nothing. He didn't even feel himself land face first on the hard courtyard ground next to the indifferent Uzi user.

The third Japanese youth in the courtyard cautiously approached the back-room window. He heard the snorting crashes of the two other automatics from inside, so he didn't want to get caught by one of the errant missiles. All he could see from his vantage point was broken furniture, still crimson-coated bodies and scurrying yellow ones. In the three seconds since the Japanese pair first broke in, seven men were killed.

To Jay Kuong Chien, the slaughter seemed to be in slow motion. To his own surprise, he reacted to the horror with calm. All his being was focused on a means of escape. Any means of escape. His friends in the room, the associates he had dined with, the acquaintances he waved to on the street, all the gamblers suddenly became meaningless pieces of meat that he had to use to stay alive.

Jay saw the gambling table, shaking from the tearing force of the

bullets and the falling weight of the corpses. He saw the men blindly charging the door and the window. He saw the Japanese cutting them down; all without getting back to his feet. He quickly judged the situation and acted immediately. He tumbled beneath the table, between the quaking wooden legs, toward the window. He kicked the table over toward the door as two more Chinese gamblers tried to climb through the broken glass pane.

The large table blocked the Japanese pair's view for a second. The Chinese duo blocked the third attacker's view. Jay leaped up after the gamblers, pushing them over the still-bleeding body of the glass-killed man and into the courtyard. He used them as shields to get close to the Uzi user. The third Japanese saw the danger Jay posed and tried to shoot him, but the other Chinese always seemed to be in the way. Both men died screaming as Jay dived forward.

His martial-art skill took over. The Uzi was pointed at Jay's chest for a second, then it was pumping its lead to the sky as Jay pushed it up and to the side with a karate block. The next second his stiffened fingers dove into the Uzi user's throat. The third Japanese choked and stumbled back, tears blinding his vision. Jay followed through with a vicious kick to the Japanese's midsection with the side of his foot. The Uzi user doubled over as Jay built up all his stamina and power into a punch that slammed into the side of the gunman's head.

The third Japanese crumbled to the side, falling on top of his sub-machine gun. Jay quickly reached down to the unconscious body to retrieve the weapon. Just as his hands touched flesh, he became aware of the two other gunmen inside. He saw the man with the MAC 11 aim at him and the VZ holder push the gun up, reprimanding him in Japanese. Jay immediately took advantage of the situation.

Reasoning that the VZ man didn't want to hit the Uzi user, Jay flipped himself behind the third Japanese and dragged him upright. Using the man as a shield, the one surviving Chinese backed toward the courtyard mouth. He reached forward to pluck the Uzi out of the unconscious man's slack fingers, but the weapon slipped out of the Japanese's grasp before he could get to it. The solid thunk of it hitting the ground was the only sound now besides the sliding grate of the third Japanese's heels.

The VZ holder was sharp. As soon as the Uzi fell useless, he barked an order at his fellow. The man with the MAC nodded and ran out of sight, back through the store. Jay knew their plan instantly. It was the only practical plan of attack. The VZ man would follow him out the window while the MAC man would bottle him in the alleyway between the street and the courtyard. It was the old "suicide squeeze"—Jay couldn't use the third Japanese as a shield in both

directions at once.

Speed was his only hope now. Speed and the luck that had been pacing him so far. He hurled the third Japanese forward as he dove for the mouth of the courtyard. As he somersaulted and rolled around the corner, he heard the Uzi user fall heavily—then the night was ripped open by renewed gunfire. He felt a sudden breeze by his ear and a small tug at his pant's leg before the wall behind him was dotted by little dust founts which were accompanied by the sound of whining ricochets.

It was darker in the thin alleyway, the bright illumination of the street's hanging lanterns and pagoda-topped lights were blocked by the buildings' walls. The walls served as a muffler for the gun noises as well. Between them and the usual din on the Chinatown streets, Jay doubted that anyone would pay any particular notice to the weapons' reports. And those that recognized the sounds would keep far away. Anyone who lived in Chinatown was used to the noise bullets made.

Jay rolled to his feet and ran as fast as he could toward the street. It beckoned to him at the end of the alley, all soft crimson light shot through with gold trimming. The moonlight and municipal lighting was diffused by the painted, gleaming doorways, the clean, steam-dripping shop windows, and the millions of lacquered souvenirs on sale everywhere. Jay headed for the soft, fuzzy glow at the end of the alley, hoping he could disappear into the tourist crowd before the Japanese gunmen could get a bead on him.

As he picked up speed, his heart sank. The odds were lousy. His sharp mind had already gauged the race between him and the MAC man, and even if he won, he lost. Jay was pretty sure he could make the sidewalk before the Japanese could block the alley, but the killer would be so close by then that Jay's death was almost a sure thing. He could attack, but surprise was no longer on his side. As his martial-arts master was always wont to point out, "Karate, no matter how good, cannot fight a bullet."

Jay's mind accepted this as his peripheral vision picked out a boarded door to his right. The Chinese immediately stopped and kicked sideways from a standing position. The nailed boards cracked beneath his foot. Karate could fight wood. He kicked again, sending the rotting door bouncing inward just as the MAC man appeared in the alley mouth. Jay leaped into the adjacent building's cellar just as the Japanese fired into the thin, dark pathway.

The 9mm bullets tore across the bricks like fingernails across a blackboard all around the doorway. Jay didn't bother to take stock of their destruction. He was off and running again—desperately avoiding death from people he didn't know, for reasons he didn't want to guess.

The light from the street only sent a dim glow through the small dirty basement windows set near the ceiling line. Jay snaked his feet out as he had learned, letting his shins and thighs hit whatever his chest and face might if he had been running flat out. He found a stairway leading up on the opposite wall and took it three steps at a time. There was a locked door at the top. Taking no chances, Jay hit it with all his strength, ripping out the lock and part of the doorjamb on the other side. The door swung open and slammed against the wall with a loud crack.

Jay stood in the narrow, stuccoed hallway of an apartment house in front of a banistered stairway leading up. He looked to his left. The front door was spotlighted by a bright yellow bulb at the end of the hall. Beyond it was a foyer with mail slots set into the wall next to a button and intercom system. Beyond that was the front door, its glass covered by a gauzy curtain. Jay didn't want to chance checking out what was behind that curtain. He knew that three men had attacked his uncle's store and back-room gambling den. He didn't know how many might be stationed as lookouts on the street. At least a half-dozen guys could be checking the surrounding houses at that very moment.

Jay looked to his left. At the opposite end of the hall was one apartment door, also illuminated by a yellow hall light. He heard some noise behind him. It was the sound at least four feet made. The MAC and VZ man must've gotten back together again. Jay had no time for subtlety. He raced to the apartment door and kicked it in.

Once his kicking foot got back to the ground, it was following his running foot. He kept moving, bashing back the door with his shoulder after it had bounced off the wall. He raced past a little bathroom on his right and a small kitchenette on his left to stumble across a little living room off an even smaller bedroom. He headed right for a window on the left side of the far wall.

On his way, he ran in between a young woman and her TV set. She was watching "Shogun Assassin" on the cable system. Up until Jay had burst in, she was laughing. As he sped past she was savagely digging through her purse. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw her whip out a nickel-plated .25-caliber automatic and point it at him. It looked like a cigarette lighter his uncle had sold in his store, but he knew it could do permanent damage at this distance. Any hope he had for a clean getaway was ruined.

Jay dove headfirst through the window, his arms folded in front of his face. He spread his limbs as he cleared the spinning glass to see a wide alley between blocks yawning out beneath him, Seven feet below was a row of parked cars and four feet below that was the ground. Jay

twisted in mid-air so he landed on the roof of an old Buick on his right shoulder. He rolled across the rear windshield and slid over the trunk until his feet touched earth. Even before all the window glass had smashed across the car, the Chinese was running again.

The movie watcher appeared in the ruined window behind him, cursing and firing her remaining bullets at his rapidly retreating figure. The .25 had little accuracy at that distance, and the girl was far from a crack shot. When the hammer hit the empty barrel, she threw the gun to the floor and shook her fist at Jay, who by then had just made it to the street.

It was all witnessed by the two Japanese in the hallway. As soon as they had gotten to the first floor, the MAC man had started toward the apartment. The VZ man stopped him with a hand on his arm.

"No outsiders," he said in English. "No innocent bystanders."

The MAC man looked back sharply, then he relaxed, the logic of his orders reaching him. "Next time maybe," he shrugged.

The first Japanese nodded brusquely and slid the autopistol under his coat. The second killer followed suit with the MAC 11 and they casually went to the double front door. They opened and walked out both, finding a groggy Uzi user standing by the front porch—his weapon secured under his jacket as well. The Uzi man looked up to see the VZ man minutely shake his head once from side to side. Then they all moved off in the direction Jay had been running.

The Chinese didn't try to figure it all out as he went as fast as he could down Washington Street. He didn't have to. It was highly unlikely that the cops had sent an all Japanese unit to break up his uncle's little gambling den—not with esoteric sub-machine guns blazing. It was done with all the style and bravado of a gangland hit, but Jay didn't see why the Italians should hire Japanese for their dirty work. It was extremely probable that the Japanese were fending for themselves. For some reason, that thought was more frightening than the rest of the suppositions put together.

Jay took a fast right onto Grant Avenue, the "main street" of San Fran's Chinatown. Like all the other ethnic areas of America, Chinatown had its own smell. But unlike all the Little Italies, its aroma was not immediately identifiable. In South Philly, North Boston, and Manhattan's Soho, the air hung heavy with the unmistakable fume of tomato paste. But here, there wasn't just one powerful scent; there was a mixture of heady, nose-tickling aromas which hung over the avenues like a cloud.

Jay ran, the sharp, cloying scent of monosodium glutimate rivaling the bland, floury aroma of cornstarch. He took in the sour smell of

frying cabbage as well as the sweet tingle of succulent chicken chunks. An inch farther and there were fatty hunks of pork and duck fighting for attention over the aromatic attractions of shredded beef and sizzling fish. The scents were thick enough to caress his brain like perfumed fingers.

As Jay moved rapidly toward downtown, he kept his eyes peeled for any sign of the Japanese trio. For any Japanese at all, in fact. While they all might look alike to the round eye, the Orientals had an innate ability to tell each other apart with absolutely no trouble. At least Jay could. To him, a Japanese or Korean was as different from a Chinese as a Negro was to an Indian.

But instead of Japanese faces, Jay saw only Chinese and white tourists leering at the rows of ornate porcelain dragon, lion, and tiger sculptures that street venders hawked in addition to calendars, woks, and trinkets. The rainbow-colored hanging lanterns made the windows full of Buddha sculptures smile benignly on him with a glow. As he passed, the inanimate good-luck dieties seemed to look after him, offering soundless solace and grinning good wishes.

In addition to the sights and smells, Jay also was acutely aware of the sounds. If he heard a bolt being pulled back, he wouldn't need to see the Japanese attacking. After all, it was the sound of the violently opened door in his uncle's shop which saved him the first time. Even if his uncle had been in a rage, he wouldn't have opened the portal like that. And no gambler ever burst in on a game. No Chinese gambler at any rate.

All he heard, however, was the din of Oriental voices. Even though Occidental tourists seemed to be everywhere, they didn't seem to chat absently as much on Chinatown streets. It could be that they were in awe of the sights and smells. It could be that they were so intent on their business that there was no time for small talk. Or it could be that they were somehow aware of just how much they were outsiders here. They could be unconsciously aware of just how much they didn't belong or fit in here. And they could subconsciously know that nothing they could do, short of plastic surgery to slant their eyes, skin grafting to color their skin and a complete reeducation to learn a Chinese language with no "American" accent, could make Chinatown accept them.

As Jay sped across Sacramento Street, he heard at least a half-dozen Chinese dialects, Cantonese being a major one. But no Japanese voices or faces. And no Czech, Israeli, or American guns pointed at him either. He slowed slightly as he neared the Chinatown movie theater. The recessed foyer was a perfect place to set an ambush. He'd have to walk right in front of it before he could see who might be lurking by

the ticket booth.

Jay stepped off the curb and into the street, keeping a thick throng of ticket holders between him and the theater doors. A lot of Chinese were coming out from the seven o'clock show, but no murderous Japanese. These Orientals were all chattering happily in front of posters advertising the newest Jackie Chan picture. If only he could dispatch his foes as easily as that martial artist-movie star, Jay found himself thinking. Only this wasn't Hong Kong during the Ming Dynasty and his enemies weren't armed with mere swords. This was Chinatown, where deadly gang fights were a way of life.

He got to the corner of Grant and Washington streets without incident, but he spent several minutes making sure he wasn't tailed before entering the Chinatown Wax Museum on the corner. He marched right up to the admissions counter and pasted a smile on his face with ease. He leaned over until he caught the counter girl's attention.

"Oh, Jay!" she said quietly, with surprise. "I didn't expect to see you until Angela got off her shift."

"I got out early," he said with a calmness he didn't feel. "She still inside?"

"Leading the last tour," said the girl, nodding. "Uh-huh."

"That's ok," he said, looking at the entrance to the exhibits. "You don't mind if I . . . ?" He made a walking motion with his fingers up in front of his face.

The admissions girl looked around. "Well, almost nobody's here and the manager left early, so I don't see why not. If anybody asks, I'll say I put it on your tab."

Jay gave her the "thumb's up" signal. "Thanks, Nora," he said. "You're an angel."

"Humph." Nora, the admissions girl, sighed in mock disapproval. "I bet you say that to all the tour guides."

"Only you," he answered over his shoulder, already moving toward the entrance. "Only you." She laughed and waved at the ticket taker to let him by. Neither she nor the other employee saw his lighthearted face turn suddenly serious and haggard. Jay moved quickly by the initial wax depictions of Chinese railroad crews in the American West, a motionless recreation of a nineteenth-century Chinese laundry, and the original fortune-cookie machine to the popular hall of infamy—the place where the really good stuff was on display.

Here were all the wax versions of the most insidious moments in Chinese history. Jay went past scenes of ancient Oriental torture

chambers, following a distant, lilting voice coming from the end of the hall. He passed a bound wax man getting eaten by rats. He passed another hanging by his long, pig-tailed hair. He passed a third having spikes driven into his feet like needles into a pincushion. A masterpiece of macabre design was the scene of the transplanted Chinese-Americans digging up their graveyards to send the rotting corpses back to China for reburial after a decade in U.S. soil.

He reached the tail end of the night's final tour group just as his girlfriend was finishing up a talk about the wax version of Empress Tzu Hsi.

"She was a very cruel lady," Angela was saying, motioning to the impressively dressed, evil-looking wax woman behind her. "She poisoned her own nephew when he got in her way. She brutally murdered her son's favorite mistress when she talked of marriage and even beheaded a eunuch for laughing in her presence. She didn't like anyone to have fun when she was around."

The tour group laughed and even Jay couldn't help smiling. Angela was a very sweet-looking, wide-eyed girl whose seeming innocence masked an outgoing nature which made her a favorite tour guide. Jay admired the way she handled the group of tourists, making her talk seem as if it wasn't rehearsed. She wore what looked like a stewardess's outfit consisting of blue high-heel pumps, a slightly slit dark blue skirt, a silky beige shirt and a matching jacket. Her hair was long and black, kept off her face by one barrette which parted her lustrous mane on the side.

She moved on to the final exhibit. It pictured a small, nasty-looking man, contorting in an old-fashioned barber chair as three Oriental gunmen blasted his body with pistols. Jay was uncomfortable just looking at it. It reminded him too much of his own plight.

"As I have said before," Angela said, turning from the tableau, "Chinatown was not always the way you see it now. At the turn of the century, Grant Avenue was called Dupont Street by the state government and 'the wickedest thoroughfare in the States' by everyone else. Before the great earthquake of 1906, the street was crammed full of opium dens, gambling parlors, black markets and houses of shame. Men were bushwhacked to serve on Chinese freighters and women were kidnapped to be sold into slavery."

At that moment, she caught sight of Jay. She interrupted her dramatic spiel for a second to smile and wave at him. He smiled wanly and nodded back, wilting slightly under the curious stares of some tourists.

"The meanest man on that street of evil," Angela continued

ominously, “was known as ‘Little Pete,’ the most vicious Tong torpedo in all of San Francisco. He was just one of the Chinese enforcers who made sure everybody stayed in line and that the Tong bosses got their piece of the action, but he became famous. Not for what he did so much as how he did it. You see, Little Pete was the first of the ‘hatchet men.’ When the order came for someone to die, Little Pete did it with an ax. He left his blade mark on more than a dozen brains in his time. He got so powerful and became so feared that they called him the ‘Al Capone of Chinatown.’ He was so unpredictable and dangerous that the Tong families had him killed in 1897. Ten years later the famous San Francisco Earthquake wiped all the sin out.

“While the quake and subsequent fire destroyed many beautiful things in the City by the Bay, it signaled a new life for Chinatown. It wiped the slate clean for the Tongs—who had started as a protection society to shield the Chinese from the bigoted Mafia hoodlums but grew into warring factions. In 1900 the great Tong feuds flared and the streets were lined in blood. The disasters of 1906 wiped that blood away and allowed our ancestors to build anew.

“Today, the seven-block long, three-block wide section of the city that you are standing amid is one of the safest communities in America.” Angela leaned in, and put her hand next to her mouth conspiratorally. “Actually, I shouldn’t be telling you this, but our crime rate is lower than the rest of San Francisco.” The crowd tittered in reply.

“And it will stay that way,” Angela summed up, “because never again do we wish to see the vice and injustice that flourished at the turn of the century. Never again will innocent women be cruelly abducted to a fate worse than death. Never again will ‘hatchet men’ roam the streets, paid killers looking for their next innocent victim. Never again.” And here she paused, her closed lips holding on to her last word so the crowd knew there was still a capper left to come.

Angela held the silence for several beats, then delivered the droll, ironic twist. “At least never again,” she said, “in Chinatown.”

The tour group laughed in recognition and took a second to applaud her before they moved out of the hall and out the lobby exits. Angela spent some more time shaking hands and answering questions before the last of the sightseers wandered out into the brightly lit night. Then the girl trotted over to Jay, put her hands on his shoulders, and planted a kiss on his mouth. He placed his palms on either side of her waist and kissed back.

She pulled away first, turning her head to look at a grinning Nora. “Let’s close up early tonight,” Angela suggested lightly. “What do you say?”

Nora perked up considerably at the suggestion. She wanted to get out and see the Jackie Chan movie before the theater closed a little after midnight. “Sounds great to me,” she cried, turning toward the ticket taker. “What do you say, Larry?”

The ticket taker pulled at his lower lip. “Gee, I don’t know . . . ,” he worried.

“Come on, Larry,” Angela said soothingly, pulling away from Jay. “I’ll close up and take full responsibility.”

“Yeah, Larry,” said Nora teasingly. “And if you change real quick, I’ll let you take me to the movies tonight.”

The Oriental ticket taker looked at the admissions girl with slight surprise, and then a sheepish grin broke out on his lips. “You’ve got a deal,” he said, already loosening his tie. He stopped himself just as he began to turn toward the employee’s changing room. “You sure you can handle it all?” he asked Angela.

“It’s nothing I haven’t done before,” she answered. “Get going or you’ll miss the opening.”

The two coworkers smiled at each other before Larry took off toward the lavatory. Angela walked over to the desk where Nora was tallying up the night’s take. “I’ll take care of it if you’d like,” Angela offered.

“Don’t worry about it,” said Nora, her practiced fingers counting the cash and rubber-banding the unused tickets together. “I don’t have to change. I’ll just throw this stuff in the safe and throw a coat over my uniform.”

“Ok,” said Angela as Jay came up behind her. “See you tomorrow. And have a good time.”

Nora nodded, preoccupied with her counting, as Jay took Angela’s arm, led her back toward the exhibits and whispered in her ear. “Is there anyplace we can talk? Alone?”

Angela looked up at him with pleasant surprise, then gingerly pulled her arm from his grasp. “Let me lock up and then we can go to the employees’ room. All right?”

“Fine,” he said, as she pulled a small ring of keys out of a pouch on her belt. He watched as she put the CLOSED sign on the front window and waited for Nora and Larry to reconnoiter. The pair went out and Angela locked the door after them. The last Jay saw of them was when they looked back to wave while walking hurriedly toward the theater. He waved lightly back, trying to maintain his flaccid expression.

As soon as they were out of sight, Jay moved forward to pull Angela back. “Come on,” he said with forced casualness. “Let’s move away

from the doors."

Angela misread his anxiousness. "Whoa, there," she said with a bright laugh, putting her hands on his chest. "Take it easy, tiger. I still have to check the exhibits for any stragglers. All right?"

"Sure," Jay said, glancing hurriedly at the front doors. All he saw was dimly lit darkness beyond the wax museum's lights. There were no curious faces there, Japanese or otherwise.

He followed her as she reentered the main hall of the museum. As soon as they both got around the corner, he took her into his arms and kissed her passionately. She reacted with surprise at first, then responded with warm affection. But it was she who pulled away finally.

"Whew!" she said with another laugh. "To what do I owe this unusual display?"

Jay swallowed, slightly embarrassed. She was right. He rarely allowed the emotion he felt to show. It was not the Oriental way. And certainly not the way of a lookout man at a gambling den. "I . . ." he stuttered, "I just wanted . . . to, uh, to say . . ."

As pleased as she was by their kiss, Angela began to get worried over her boyfriend's sudden character change. Until then, he was like many young Chinese. Slightly smug, a bit possessive, assured, and occasionally distantly moody.

"That's all right," she said to make things easier. "You don't have to say anything." She felt a love she had never felt before broil across her entire body. He felt something real toward her. At that moment, she would have done anything for him.

"We've got to talk," he said soberly.

"All right," she replied. "Let's talk as I check the hall."

The two began walking. Jay remained silent for a while, looking down at the floor as Angela divided her time between checking the dimly lit exhibits and her boyfriend's face. By his subtly, but rapidly, changing expressions, it seemed as if he was wrestling with his conscience or trying to come to a monumental decision.

"Angela," he finally said. "You've got to come away with me." He said it without taking his eyes from the floor.

Angela looked away and up at the ceiling, all her self-assurance leaving her like a dove taken flight. For a second she felt as giddy as a schoolgirl being asked for her first dance. But then the reality of their situation and place returned to her. "Jay," she said, as softly as possible. "I don't understand. Come away with you? What do you mean?"

“Just that,” he said flatly, looking at her. “You must leave with me tonight and never come back to Chinatown.”

“Leave Chinatown?” she echoed haltingly. “But why? Where would we go?”

“I’ve got some money,” Jay assured her, reaching into his pocket and pulling out a wad of bills. “We could go anywhere. L.A. No. wait, even better. Seattle. Or maybe Canada.”

“Jay, what are you talking about? Where did you get that money?”

“I won it. Tonight. At my . . . my uncle’s place.”

“Jay! You told me you had stopped gambling!”

“Christ, Angela,” he sputtered. “I have. I swear. Tonight was the last time.”

They stood facing each other in the very center of the dim exhibit hall, with the motionless wax bodies of history’s unfortunates all around them. Their increasingly harried conversation was halted by a third voice reaching their ears.

“Tell her why,” said the voice.

Jay was frozen in place. Angela gasped in surprise, her head looking in every possible direction.

“Tell her why,” the voice repeated, “tonight was the last time.”

As the words, spoken in accented English, echoed throughout the hall, Angela saw a shadow detach itself from one of the exhibits. Then Jay grabbed her hand and ran madly for the exit. Another shadow appeared in front of that. Jay immediately turned toward the lobby. Another human shape stood between the brightly illuminated foyer and the dim museum interior. They were boxed in, with the Chinese laundrymen and Empress Tzu Hsi on either side, staring with waxen pity.

Jay stumbled back, then wrapped his arms protectively around the girl.

‘Go on,” said the shadow next to the exhibit. “Tell her.” The hall was filled with silence for a moment. “If you don’t, I will.” Jay still refused to say anything. A frightened Angela looked from his face to the shadowy figure over her shoulder. “All right,” said that figure. “Tonight was his last night at his uncle’s because the gambling parlor is no more. They are all dead.”

Angela gasped again. “Is this true?” she whispered pleadingly up into Jay’s face.

“They ought to know,” Jay said angrily, holding her closer. “They killed them.”

Angela looked in each direction as the shadows began to approach slowly. She was building up to a scream until she saw their weapons emerge before them in the little pools of museum light. The blue steel of their automatic weapons seemed to glow in the eerie illumination. Their bodies and facial features took shape immediately after. They were Japanese—the same three Japanese who had tried to kill Jay before.

"Nihonmachi," Angela breathed in amazement.

"What are you doing here?" Jay asked rather stolidly. "How did you get in?"

"We knew your girlfriend's name," said the VZ man, coming closer from his hiding place behind the exhibit. "We knew where she worked. We knew all we needed to know about you."

"What do you want?" Angela demanded.

"Not to talk," said a harsh voice behind her. Both Chinese spun their heads as the MAC man behind them violently pulled the girl out of Jay's grip. The young Chinese reacted instinctively, for the last time. He lashed out quickly with the heel of his hand, catching the Japanese on the side of his nose. If the blow had landed straight, the man's nose would have been broken at best—and his nasal cartilage would have been driven into his brain, killing him, at worst.

Instead, the hit snapped the MAC man's head around, sending him back but not knocking him over. He maintained his grip on the girl, though, pulling her farther away from the Chinese boy. The Japanese with the Uzi needed no more encouragement. Almost as soon as Jay had struck, letting loose a karate-inspired yell, the Uzi user spread his stance and pulled the Israeli weapon tight against his hip.

One burst of four bullets raced up Jay's torso. One bullet thwacked into his side just above his belt. The second split open the side of his shirt and drove itself into the top of his stomach. The third burrowed into his armpit, tearing apart a lung. The fourth smacked into his neck, just below his jawbone.

Angela managed one thin, shocked, screech before the MAC man found his footing and shoved his free hand over her mouth. He jammed the MAC barrel under her chin in an additional effort to keep her mouth closed. She reared in his clutches, burbling madly behind his hand, tears streaming out of her eyes.

Jay Kuong Chien stood stock still for a moment, refusing to allow the bullets to move him, until he realized that he was dead. His mind knew it before he would accept it. Even then, he inwardly demanded his body to take vengeance on his killer. With a sudden, spasmodic move, his body whipped around to face the Uzi user.

The Japanese was unimpressed. He simply shot Jay again, point-blank, in the face and chest. The Chinese fell back, landing like a dropped board. The noise of the chattering Uzi reverberated among the wax exhibits, then disappeared—the only sound then being Angela's renewed, muffled horror. She twisted and shook in the MAC man's grip, her eyes wide and staring at Jay's motionless and bloody body. He looked back at her, his eyes as wide and empty as the wax men around him. "Fight now, Bruce Lee," the Uzi user said derisively.

Angela twisted away from the sight, clawing at the MAC man's arms like a trapped cheetah. She bit and scratched at his flesh until he had to throw the MAC down to get a better grip on her. Angela pulled his mucous-covered hand off her mouth. His arm then settled around her neck. She gasped, cried, and moaned as his other arm clamped around her middle. As they had for the last few seconds, the two struggling figures moved like a toy ostrich drinking from a glass of water. They would bob forward under the weight of Angela's struggles, and then the Japanese's strength would pull her back, her feet kicking off the ground.

"Come on," the MAC man hissed. "Help me with her, would you?"

The Uzi user moved forward immediately. The man with the VZ stood in place in front of Empress Hsi. The Japanese using the Israeli weapon slung it on his back and grabbed the girl's hands. Together they pulled her down to the floor. When she realized what they were going to do, she tried screaming again, but once her back was flat on the floor, the MAC man's hand was over her mouth again. The three other Japanese hands were occupied elsewhere on her body.

"All right," the VZ man said indifferently in Japanese. "You got your revenge, and you got your innocent bystander. Let's get on to the main attraction of the night." He still stood in place.

"There's time," the MAC man said in Japanese, ripping at the girl's skirt while pushing down on her lips and teeth all the harder. "We won't be able to do this with the other one." And the MAC man didn't mean the corpse of Jay Kuong Chien. He meant the person they had been instructed to kidnap after wiping out the gambling shop.

"No," the Uzi user agreed. "The other one is of our kind. Japanese. You know we are not supposed to soil her." So saying, he tore open Angela's shirt.

All right," the VZ man said again. "But hurry up. We should kill this one and get the other one soon. Let's get home before midnight."

So the Japanese stood as a guard with his Czech weapon held loosely while the other two young men took turns raping the Chinese tour guide. The last thing she saw through blurred eyes before

merciful unconsiousness came was Little Pete—the hatchet man—writhing in the barber chair.

CHAPTER

Two

Inspector Harry Callahan got home before midnight. He pulled his long-suffering used car off the sloping street and down the driveway to the one-floor garage under the ancient mansion. As usual, there was a thin space between the Toyota and Pinto in front of the section of wall with the faded stencil painting of the cop's name.

It wasn't always like that. When a Cadillac first moved in across the floor, the owner had taken delight in parking his monster across Harry's and the Toyota's space. Harry had removed a small, but extremely important part of the Caddy's drive mechanism and left a note on the windshield saying the Caddy owner could retrieve it only after pushing the car to its rightful place across the way.

The next morning, the Caddy owner came stomping and snorting up to Harry's third-floor apartment—which the cop had so graciously noted on the windshield message—only to be faced with all six feet and some odd inches of Harry's rock-hard body and coarse, weathered face.

The Caddy owner suddenly forgot what he had planned to say, swallowed once, and then uttered these four words. "I'll move the car." Harry hadn't had any trouble since. The dependable, consistent San Fran homicide cop slipped his old car between the two compacts with just inches to spare on either side. He could only get his door half-open to squeeze his strong frame outside.

Standing wedged between the two cars, his door scraping the outside of the Toyota's side, Harry glanced at the faded, chipped name on the wall in front of him. "Calahan." It had been spelled wrong from the very first day, so every time he got a notice from the landlord about a raise in rent—which seemed like every six months—it was addressed to "Harold Calahan." And no matter how clearly he signed his checks "Harry Callahan," the situation never changed.

Harry took this minor cosmic aggravation in the same stride that he took the dozens of killings he had to investigate week after week. Some things were facts of life for him—like misspelling and murder. It was something he decided to live with, and he did what he could about it. Otherwise, it was nothing to get unduly concerned over. Enough truly terrible things had happened in his life to make him

want to cherish the good things and ignore almost everything else.

He closed his car door, leaving it unlocked, and walked back the way the car had come. If anyone really wanted to steal the old wreck, they were welcome to it, Harry figured. The city would simply give him another one. The department had learned long ago that you didn't give a new car to Inspector seventy-one. No, Inspector seventy-one had a bad habit of putting the car between him and a lot of bullets. Harry always got the cars the city had already written off.

Harry climbed up the driveway to set foot on the sidewalk outside his apartment building. The area wasn't brilliantly lit by the street lights, but it was clear enough to see almost all the way down the block in either direction. The rest of the street's dwellings were like his; delapidated mansions which had seen better days, transformed into apartments. Some of them had even turned condo. Harry could hardly wait until the landlord informed "Harold Calahan" that the same thing was going to happen here. Harry'd be damned if he'd pay some absurd amount to buy a bedroom, kitchen, and bathroom hardly big enough to sit up in.

The only life stirring on the left side of the street were the various rooms alight with images of Johnny Carson entertaining the masses. Off to his right, however, was one lone female figure coming toward him on the sidewalk. Even from all the way down the block, Harry recognized his first-floor neighbor, Suni Michelle. When they had first met, in 1973, she had just moved away from home and was calling herself Sunny.

At first, there had been only a sexual attraction. At the tender age of eighteen, she was already sexually experienced, coming on to him in the lobby of their building. She lived in the apartment behind the mailboxes, so when he was retrieving his bills one day she appeared and coyly said, "I've been living here for almost six months now. What does a girl have to do to go to bed with you?"

With almost equal subtlety, Harry replied, "Try knocking on the door."

She did, that very night, and they did—both studiously ignoring the dusty, yellowing photo of Harry and a happy, pretty blond in a cheap frame that sat on the night stand next to the bed. It was no more than a one-night stand until Harry saved her life from a mailbox bomb that was meant for him.

After he cleaned up what was to be called the "Magnum Force" case —because he had broken up a ring of murdering vigilantes within the police force—he and the girl had let their defenses down a bit. She told him about her strict, emotionless Oriental upbringing which left

her desperate for any kind of affection and he told her about his wife —killed by a drunk driver in an auto accident.

He watched her turn from a cock-teasing, self-possessed college girl to a self-assured businesswoman with a strong sense of her own worth. He watched her now, coming up the street. She was wearing a light, long dark jacket which seemed to blend into her hair—which was flecked with reddish highlights thanks to the bright California sun. Between the jacket's lapels Harry could see a dark maroon V-necked leotard. Beneath the jacket's hem Harry could see thick leg warmers from her thighs to her shins, ending up in two orange Frye boots.

She smiled when she saw him waiting for her and quickened her pace. As she drew near, he saw a thin sheen of sweat covering her skin between the leotard's cloth. It made her upper chest glow and was extremely sexy somehow. From her perspiration, the way she was dressed, and the way she was breathing—deeply—Harry assumed she had just come from a late exercise class.

"Hello, Harry," she said, slipping her fingers under the lapels of his brown tweed jacket. "Working late as always, I see."

Harry nodded with a grin. "You too," he said, making a point of staring at her outfit with appreciation.

Suni looked down at herself with a certain pride. "You ain't seen nothing yet," she said throatily. She flipped open the bottom of her coat to let her whole right leg appear, showing Harry that she had on nothing but the leotard, sheer, almost sparkling pantyhose, and the thick leg warmers. A second later, she flipped the coat flap back in place. "You got a search warrant, copper?" she quipped.

"Probable cause," Harry murmured. "That's all I need."

Suni laughed and gave him a quick kiss. "You got it," she declared. "Come on." Harry followed her hopping shape up the porch steps a little more slowly. She stopped at the door and waited a second for him. "Eaten?" she asked as she twisted the knob and pushed the heavy door in.

Harry had to think about it. His life was full of chili dogs and B.L.T. cheeseburgers caught at all hours. "No," he finally decided. "You get the mail, I'll get the door," he said, reaching into his pocket.

Suni had a duplicate mailbox key for Harry's apartment. He made a point of giving her one after the bomb incident as a kind of souvenir. At first, she was reticent to approach the box, but then Harry reminded her that "lightning never strikes twice in the same place."

"Besides," he added once she had put the copy key in the lock the second time, "now everybody'll know that they'll only kill a little girl if they try it again." She chased him around her apartment after that

little verbal trick. Now, almost a decade later, she pushed the key in without fear.

"Amazing," she mused, pulling his crinkled letters out. "After all this time, you're still getting the same stuff."

Harry took the two envelopes she handed him as he held the plain inside door open with his body, and she retrieved her own stuff. "I'm not much for letter writing," he grumbled, looking at the letters' return addresses as she brushed past him. One was an annual pleading for his PAL dues and the other was an urgent request for money from the Handgun Control Organization in Washington.

Harry believed in every man's right to bear arms, but he had personally killed so many of those arm bearers that the anti-handgun agency would get a hard-earned tener from Harry. Fuck the big-game hunters, Harry thought. Deers had rights too, as far as he was concerned.

"You want to go out to eat?" Suni asked, slipping the key into her apartment door lock.

"I don't know," Harry musingly answered, still looking at his two pieces of junk mail as if they were the latest issue of *Playboy*. "I'll think about it."

"You want to come in?" Suni asked in a softer, more personal tone. Harry stopped at the stairway and looked over at her. She stood, naturally provocative, a bit behind her open door. It was a blaringly open invitation.

For a second, Harry was drawn to it like a paper clip to a magnet. Then his famous self-control took over. "Then we'll never get to eat," he told her with a smile. "And if you say, 'Depends on what you're hungry for,' I'll take you across my knee."

Suni frowned mockingly at the first part of his declaration, then cheered up at the second. "I'll keep that in mind," she promised. "I hope you're not tired."

"Just want to change," Harry assured her. "I'll be right down."

"I'll meet you halfway," Suni compromised. "I've got some leftover takeout in the fridge. You got some beer?"

"Sure."

"Tell you what, then. I'll warm the food and bring it up . . ." She paused momentarily, looking at the floor with a grin. Finally she could no longer contain herself. "Then I'll do the same for you," she said with a knowing exaggerated look that spoke volumes.

Harry brought his right forefinger up and waved it at her in an admonishing motion. "I warned you," he said. "My knee will be

waiting." And then he couldn't keep from adding, "among other things."

She laughed and went inside her apartment as Harry turned to start the three-story climb to his place. On the way up, he thought about Suni. He was both father-confessor and lover to the woman. He was hardly around, but when he was, she told him things no one else knew. Harry probably knew more about the twenty-seven-year-old than her parents did. The one thing her parents had over him was knowledge of her real name. Sunny had become Suni, but Michelle had stayed the same. It was not a Japanese name, but the woman remained adamant about keeping it. Harry could understand why. From what she had told him about her absurdly strict, nearly hypocritical upbringing, it wasn't surprising that she had renounced her past.

Harry unlocked his door and twisted the knob. Unconscious habit made him do this with one hand, leaving the other one free in case of emergency. His door swung in with an uneventful creak, revealing an almost octagonal room that gave new meaning to the word "quaint." It was quaint the same way a slum could be called "rustic." To the left of the door was a bureau. To the left of that was the bathroom door. To the left of that was a small refrigerator. To the left of that was a kitchenette so small the fridge had to be put in the living area.

To the left of that doorless doorway was the night table with his wife's picture on it. To the left of that was the unmade bed. The covers might not be that great, but Harry had bought the best mattress and box spring that money could buy. The last thing he needed was back trouble or insomnia. Next to the bed was another table with a portable black-and-white TV on it. Behind that was a two-door closet. Next to that was the front door, and it all started over again.

There was one great thing about the apartment, Harry figured. No ambusher could realistically hide in it. The cop shrugged off his jacket and threw it over the back of the one chair at the foot of the bed in the middle of the room. While undoing his shirt with one hand, he opened and reached into his icebox with the other. As the last button came undone, the can of brew reached his lips.

The next thing that had to come off was his gun. Harry pulled the weapon out of its shoulder holster. In his hand was a Smith and Wesson Magnum .44 Model 29 revolver. In his closet was the adapting kit and the eight-and-three-quarter-inch barrel, but at the moment, Harry carried the blue steel version with the six-and-a-half-inch barrel. What little he lost in accuracy, he more than made up for in practicality. With the eight-inch barrel on, it was like hauling a bazooka out of his armpit.

The six-and-some-odd-inch barrel suited his needs best, especially in conjunction with his specially made holster. Harry tossed the gun on the end of the bed and started pulling the shoulder apparatus off. It was the soft "Lawman Leather Cutaway" holster, designed and built specifically for him in 1969. During the various student skirmishes of the decade, which occasionally led to death, Harry found his quick draw marred by the regulation holsters which kept the revolver's cylinder enclosed.

So the cop had the Lawman Company make him a device that was cut out in the side of the upper portion so the .44's cylinder would protrude. In the more than a decade since, Harry's exploits with the holster had become so well known "in the trade" that the holster company had taken to calling the new mass-produced cutaway the "Dirty Harry" model. Whenever some patron would inquire as to why, the company's execs would regale them with stories about the time Harry foiled an armed robbery single-handed, how he foiled a skyjacking single-handed, or the time he rescued the mayor from terrorists single-handed.

Harry Callahan drank the rest of his beer single-handed. He crushed the can in his hand, threw it across the room and into the kitchen garbage can without hitting the sides, and then sat down at the head of his bed.

Downstairs, Suni Michelle only got to scream once.

It was enough. Almost as soon as the sound registered, Harry had bounded forward from his seated position, scooped up his .44 and leaped over the end of the bed as well as the chair.

Harry flew out his apartment door and vaulted over the banister. He landed midway down the first flight of steps. From the sound of the scream, Suni had been surprised at the second-story landing. Harry had to turn a stairway corner before he could see what happened. He jumped down the remainder of the steps, swinging around the corner and preparing to bellow the woman's name.

On the second-floor landing were three black-suited men crawling all over the unconscious form of Suni Michelle. That, in itself, was not incredible. Harry had subconsciously harbored worries that one of the city's many sick weirdos would target the attractive woman for raping and/or murder. But the weapons the three men held were not of the normal psycho variety. One had a VZ61 Scorpion in one hand, another had a MAC 11, and the third had an Uzi. And all three weapons were silenced.

The man with the VZ pointed at Harry with the weapon, barking something in an Oriental language. As Harry threw himself back, he

saw the man with the Uzi spin around. He wasn't going to stay to see what happened next. Even with his Magnum talent, he wasn't about to start shooting because of the possibility of hitting Suni. The other men had no such obstacle.

The VZ and Uzi went off at the same time, tearing up the top step and the wall he had just been standing in front of. Harry didn't stick around to check out the damage. He charged back up to his apartment, jumped back across the bed, and threw open the window. He swung himself out onto the fire escape and climbed down to the second floor as fast as he could.

Standing on no ceremony, he found the first open window and dove in. He landed in someone's dark, well-appointed living room on his shoulder, rolled and jumped for the door. Whoever lived there slept through Harry's invasion. The back of the cop's mind noted to tell the guy it wasn't safe to leave his window open. Harry clicked open the door's two locks and ran out into the hall. The last of the men's heads disappeared under the landing. By the sound of their hurried footsteps, they were racing for the front door.

Harry took two long steps and bent himself double over the banister. He held himself there with his left hand and stomach muscles. His right hand brought the Magnum down in front of him. The VZ man was carrying Suni's limp body out the front door. The two others were skittering behind him. Harry saw them upside down, since he was hanging over the banister like a possum sleeping with his tail wrapped around a tree limb.

His position threw his first shot off. The big blue Magnum boomed in the confines of the thin stairwell, the bullet smashing the glass next to the inside locked door. The Uzi man immediately pivoted and brought his vicious weapon up. Harry remained hanging even when he saw the masked man's finger tighten. Streams of 9mm Parabellum tore up the stairs and the wall, accompanied only by the hacking cough of the silenced sub-machine gun.

It hardly made a difference. The masked shooter wasn't really looking where he was firing. It was the surprise of a Magnum going off that made him fire back in the first place. These three boy-os were dressed professionally—all in black to blur their outlines with dark ski masks covering everything but their eyes—and they were armed like seasoned terrorists. It was painfully obvious that they wanted to get Suni only and not leave any shells or corpses behind to set up a trail. Unless they had to.

The Uzi user ran after his associates, swinging the locked door closed behind him. It was all the same to Harry. He shot the Magnum right through the door. The .44 boomed again, bucked, and the bullet

blasted through the door's glass and into the Uzi user's left shoulder. The disguised man hunched, twisted, and fell against the mailboxes.

The MAC man, framed in the second, heavy wood front door, twisted around to cover his friend. Harry fired his third shot at the same moment the MAC man fired his first. The 9mm rounds of the sub-machine gun tore out slices of the banister next to Harry's face, pushing him back and up in spite of himself. Harry's slug punched out a two-inch section of the wooden door's side.

As Harry fell back, the MAC man grabbed his wounded partner by his good shoulder and hauled him outside. Harry heard the thick door slam as he leaped up and rounded the landing to charge down the stairs. His shoe hit something wet and gooey. It slid right across the stuff and sent Harry crashing to the floor on his back. As he dropped, he realized that it was the dinner Suni had promised to bring him.

The leftovers saved his life. Almost as soon as he fell, the painfully vindictive Uzi user and MAC man opened up on the closed front door as some sort of a warning not to follow them. The bullets bore through the wood and shot up the staircase over Harry's prone figure. The cop pulled himself forward, letting the foodstuffs get crushed under him as he snaked down the stairs. He stood the moment the flurry of lead stopped.

Midway down the first-floor flight, he blasted another .44 round in return. A peephole the size of an "a-ok" finger sign appeared in the middle of the thick wooden door as the revolver's report echoed up all three flights. Harry reached the first floor before the sound had diminished and twisted off toward Suni's apartment just before some more 9mm missiles came shooting through the door. The portal was beginning to look like a slice of brown swiss cheese.

Harry kicked open Suni's door and ran from the small foyer into the living room. Since the woman lived on the first floor facing out on the street, her place had a bay window. Through it, Harry could see that the VZ man was loading her into the back of a dark, nearly windowless van. His two associates were covering his ass. Harry decided to keep them occupied. He pushed the Magnum's barrel through Suni's window and fired once again.

It was one time he wished he had the eight-inch barrel. With its added accuracy, he just might have been able to hit the hunched over Uzi user again or the left rear tire that was just behind him. As it was, the .44 slug took off a piece of the man's pant's leg and poked a hole in the van's side—just to the left of the tire and too low to hurt anyone inside.

The backup men didn't take their time returning Harry's shot, but as

their bullets blasted out the remainder of Suni's bay window, Harry was already racing past her dining room to barrel through her bedroom. He jumped onto her bed, using it as a trampoline to throw him toward her bath. Inside the spotless, white-tiled expanse he found the opaque blue window leading out to her fire-escape landing.

He threw the window wide, dove out, scrambled for the ladder and slid down the creaking thing to the ground. Harry came around the base of the building just as two masked men slammed the back doors of the van and ran toward the front seat on either side of the vehicle.

Harry did some quick calculating. The VZ man had to be in the back with Suni, so his best bet was to peg the one heading for the driver's seat. That would give him a couple of extra seconds with the van stationary. Without further ado, Harry let the guy on the driver's side have it right in the back. His aim was perfect this time. He could practically chart the bullet's progress as it streaked unerringly from the cloud of metal ash and fire at the end of the barrel to right between the MAC man's scapulas.

The MAC man flew forward, his back a tangled, bloody mess, and splattered against the open front door which caught him like an outstretched hand. The power of the .44 bullet combined with his own speed kept him flat against the door as it stretched as far as its moorings would let it go, and snapped back. Like a hand, the door threw the dead MAC man so that he landed on the street with a sodden thud.

Harry changed his view so that the .44's sights converged on the back of the Uzi user. The wounded man was dragging himself painfully toward the passenger door so Harry had more time to nail him. Waiting until his aim was perfectly aligned—just before the Uzi user pulled himself into the van—Harry pulled the Magnum's trigger.

His hammer clicked onto a spent shell.

Harry didn't even bother to curse himself as he reached toward his pocket for a speed loader. Then he cursed himself. The speed loader was upstairs in his tweed jacket. All Harry was wearing now was an open shirt and his pants. He had been so rattled by Suni's scream and subsequent kidnapping that he forgot to get his extra rounds as well as neglected to count his shots.

All this went through his mind as he was charging for the dead man's dropped submachine gun. If he could reach it before the VZ man got to the driver's seat or the Uzi user could muster enough strength to shoot back, he—and Suni—might still have a chance.

Just as he got to the rear of the vehicle, the motor gunned into life. The vehicle leaped forward, crushing the dropped MAC 11 under its

rear wheel. Harry reacted instantaneously. Forgetting the gun, he grabbed the rear door handle, twisted and pulled.

He saw Suni lying unconscious on the van's floor. He saw the back of the VZ user's head behind the wheel. And he saw the Uzi user twisted in his seat, the gun pointed back at Harry.

The weapon rattled with power, the bullets searing by Harry's face. He actually felt them whipping closer and closer in the space of a second until it seemed sure that the next bullet would smash into his skin. At that moment, the Uzi clicked empty. Harry wasn't the only one with reloading problems.

But before he could take advantage of the situation, the van picked up sudden speed, ripping the rear door handle out of Harry's hand and sending him tumbling to the road. He dropped his Magnum and rolled to the curb as the vehicle streaked down the street.

Callahan forcibly stopped his cushioning roll so he could get a look at the van's license plate. As he assumed even before he did it, the plate was removed. As he looked, the van took the corner with a screech, letting centrifugal force close the door Harry had opened. It quickly disappeared behind the buildings.

Even then Harry didn't call it quits. He raced into the underground garage, jumped into his car, grabbed the police radio at the same time he was jamming the keys from his pants pocket into the ignition, and started everything up. He was putting an All Points Bulletin (APB) out on the van at the same time as he was wrenching his car out from between the two compacts and tearing out onto the street.

As soon as he had dispatched all the pertinent info, he threw the radio mike down and scrambled in his glove compartment for the extra speed loaders he always secreted there. Ever since the corrupt Lieutenant Neil Briggs caught him without extra bullets, Harry had made a point of sticking speed loaders all over the place. As it turned out, he hadn't needed his .44 to get Briggs—the brain behind the "Magnum Force" of vigilante cops. He had finished him off with the bomb he had taken out of his mailbox.

As Callahan scoured the streets for any sign of the van, he wished he had had another bomb to hurl at the kidnappers. His newly loaded Magnum was certainly doing him no good now. For all intents and purposes, the van had disappeared. As thoroughly as Harry checked and as often as he called in for any news, no one had seen the damn thing. After almost three hours of scouring the streets, Harry had to admit it to himself. The van had gotten away. And with it, the only woman he had allowed himself to care for in more than five years.

Angry and tired, Harry looked around to see exactly where the hell

he was. His eyes had gotten bloodshot and dry from staring intently for the van. Although he possessed a rudimentary understanding of the roadways and an inherent navigational sense, Harry hadn't been paying much attention to anything else.

Glancing out the passenger's window, he immediately recognized the Maritime Museum sitting just in front of the west basin of Fisherman's Wharf. Out the window on his side was the impressive ten-story Ghirardelli Square shopping complex. During the day, the place was a phantasmagoria of tourists, shoppers, salesmen, and street performers, but at three o'clock in the morning, it was deathly still.

Looking in his rear-view mirror, Harry caught sight of the fishing fleet—taking off from the east basin on their daily trip under the Golden Gate Bridge. It was a picturesque, romantic sight—completely at odds with the way he felt. Harboring no idealistic illusions, Harry looked away from the misty, heroic image—just in time to see a van disappear behind a building on North Point Street across the square.

Callahan stomped on his accelerator, the powerful, pre-emission car engine hurling the vehicle forward. Harry screeched around the corner onto Van Ness and took another hard left on North Point. By then the van was way down the line, all the traffic lights with him. Harry poured on the speed, trying to get close enough to get a good look at the other vehicle. At this distance, he couldn't be sure if it was the same one which stole Suni.

A red light slowed him just as the van took a left on Stockton, but not for long. Harry simply slowed until he could check down Leavenworth in both directions, then roar forward again. Just let someone try to give him a ticket for running a light. Callahan would punch his ticket permanently.

When he got to Stockton, the van was no longer in sight. Harry raced ahead, checking Beach and Jefferson as he passed. Seeing nothing but a few cars moving, he screeched onto Fisherman's Wharf proper, his eyes darting back and forth to take in everything. His tenacity paid off. The van was parked down at Pier thirty-five.

It was only then that Harry started to consider why the trio of terrorists had taken Suni. He slowed the car down and approached the pier cautiously. As he passed between the row of piers on the waterfront and the dozens of closed-up seafood shops and stalls, he considered calling in the cavalry, who would bottle the thirty-fifth pier up tighter than a pair of wet designer jeans on Orson Welles. Then he thought better of it. The three men who took Suni were willing to pepper an apartment building with lead—these weren't the run-of-the-mill crooks who took hostages because they saw it done on Kojak.

One man had a much better chance of slipping in and getting the drop on them without the hostage's head being put on the block. Harry cut his lights, turned off the car's engine, and silently rolled toward the motionless van. Holding the wheel with his right hand, he had the Magnum up and ready with his left. The dark van began to take distinct shape in front of him.

Quickly looking to his left, he saw a variety of pleasure crafts, outboards, yachts, and cabin cruisers, bobbing in the early morning waves. With this quick glance, Harry noted that only one ship revealed any life. It was the seaworthy yacht three-quarters of the way down on the right side. There were lights on below deck and the distant sound of music and laughter.

Callahan brought his attention back to the van. He just saw its dark side out the windshield as the car slowed to a crawl. Harry pulled it even closer to the water and let it slow completely to a stop without touching the brake. Then, not even wanting to betray himself with the noise of his door opening and closing, he pulled himself out the open window.

Harry headed toward the van on foot, the .44 held up like a beacon, his body tensed and ready for action. He was within twenty feet of the thing when he noticed the window on the back doors. It was a small, curtained glass section, positioned high up on the left-hand rear door of the vehicle. Harry straightened, lowered his weapon, and walked farther to the right.

He saw that the license plate was attached under the back bumper and unobstructed. It was not the same van. Unless, by some phenominal stroke of luck, the terrorists had transferred Suni to another, nearly identical, van, Harry had stalked a couple of guys going to a yacht-side party.

Leaving nothing to chance, he went over to the vehicle and checked it close up. Looking through the rear window, he saw that it was a simple, stripped-down affair, consisting only of a single front seat which could hold three and an empty, uncarpeted, uncushioned flat bed in the back. Harry walked around to the passenger side and with irritation, shoved the Magnum back into its holster. He pulled the jacket back into place and turned to go back to his car.

He stopped halfway around and slowly returned to his previous stance. He had seen something out of the corner of his eye as he was turning. It was something unusual happening on the lighted boat. Just as Harry was turning, a blond man with a mustache had clubbed a chubby, dark-haired man on the deck. As he looked back, he could just make out a cut-off high-pitched scream over the thumping rock music. If he had not seen the man get hit up top, he would have

assumed the screech was part of the music. Instead, he stood by the van and paid careful attention to the rocking, lit-up yacht.

The blond man with the mustache looked down at the man he had just slugged. The guy was facedown on the highly polished deck, a small pool of blood forming under his face. He must have broken his nose when he fell flat on the deck, the blond figured. There was also a stream of blood oozing from the cut on his scalp where the blond had hit him with the butt of his Colt .45 automatic.

Smugly satisfied that the chubby troublemaker would be out for some time to come, the blond told an aide to keep watch and casually went below deck. In the main cabin he found the group as he left them. Two men were beating the young "captain" of the ship while the third had his girlfriend. The captain looked to be in his early thirties and would have been rakishly good-looking if not for all the bruises and cuts the beating duo had splashed his face with. He was rocking back and forth on his wheeled desk chair as the two men took turns punching him with their fists and handguns.

The girl was a streaked blond in her middle twenties who filled out a one-piece bathing suit admirably. Her captor had her left arm wrenched high up her back and kept his other arm locked around her windpipe. She struggled, choked, and mewed to the delight of her attacker.

"That's enough," said the blond with the .45, holding it up. "For the moment." The two men beating the yacht's owner immediately stopped and pressed the man's arms to the arms of his chair, which were already cruelly bound there with strands of his own clothing. The blond leaned into the bleeding, purple, puffy face of the tortured captain.

"Now I told you before," he said quietly, "before we were so rudely interrupted by your 'first mate,' that you're carrying a load for me. You picked it up in the Caribbean and hid it aboard ship. I want to know where it is."

"And I've told you," the beaten man breathed through swollen, cracked lips, "I don't know what you're talking about."

The blond swung the .45 across the captain's jaw in a vicious arc. The resulting sound was so sharp and painful even to hear that the girl gasped in shock. Somehow, the captain managed to remain conscious although he moaned and cried.

"All right," he finally managed to gasp. "But it isn't yours. I swore to my father that I wouldn't . . ."

The blond interrupted him by shoving the barrel of the .45 into his mouth, cracking three teeth in the process.

“Look,” he said. “This could be a little easier or a lot harder. You can tell us where the stuff is or you can watch us gang rape your girlfriend before I blow off the back of your head and we pull this fucking boat apart. Now what is it going to be?”

Tears streamed out of the captain’s eyes, while blood streamed out of his mouth and around the dark automatic barrel. He couldn’t make words around the obstruction of the gun, but finally he shook his head from side to side.

“All right, asshole,” said the blond. He turned to his fellows. “Let’s go, boys,” he continued. “It’s party time.”

The blond took the gun out of the captain’s mouth just as the girl was thrown to the floor, and the three men set upon her like wolves on a banquet.

“Stop it!” the captain yelled. “Stop it! It’s in the hold. It’s in a space between the wall and the hull. Now please, stop it.”

The blond was satisfied. He pulled a kerchief out of his back pocket and stuffed it in the captain’s ruined mouth. He turned to the pile of people on the floor who seemed to have no intention of stopping.

“Come on,” hissed the blond. “That’s enough. We’ve got to get the stuff and get out of here. Tie her up and gag her, then get into the hold and get working. There’ll be plenty of time for that later.”

One of the men looked up as the other two began binding the girl with wire and tape. “I’m not going to make it with some corpse!” he complained. “Aren’t we supposed to kill these guys?”

“Of course, stupid!” said the blond. “But not here. We’ve got to put them someplace where they’ll never be found. Hurry up.”

The blond turned toward the door as the three men wrestled the girl onto the daybed, her wrists already bound behind her. The blond climbed the ladder to the deck and called to the lookout he had stationed there. “Bring the van down, would ya? We’ve got to load up now.”

The guard turned, nodded, then headed off down the wide wharf to their dark, empty vehicle. He slipped into the driver’s seat, gunned the engine, and slowly drove the van to the calmly bobbing boat. He parked it in such a way that its rear doors faced the yacht door leading below deck. Inside, the four men were ripping out the inside wall to find brick after brick of hashish and marijuana. Outside, the lookout got out of the van and opened the back doors in anticipation.

Under the van, Harry Callahan loosened his grip on the hot undercarriage of the vehicle and silently lowered himself to the wharf. With the guard surveying the scene on deck there was no way he

could sneak down the pier. So, he crawled under the van as the guy approached and let him unknowingly chauffeur him to the scene of the crime.

It only took an hour to load the relatively small amount of drugs into the van under the cover of night, but even that amount was worth a fortune on the street. While they worked, Harry patiently calculated the opposition. Unless one was on guard with the hostages below deck, there were five guys—all young, all armed with high-powered handguns. In addition to the blond leader and the sandy-haired lookout man, there was a brown-haired guy, a balding man with a mustache, and a black-haired man with a beard. All very able-looking and all readily identifiable. Harry pulled the Magnum out of his holster with hardly a sound.

"Right on schedule," said the blond man. "The restaurant owners'll be showing up here to get their fish for the day pretty soon. So let's get the others and get out of here."

Harry knew a cue when he heard one. He had to break up the modern-day pirates before they got the cover of innocent bystanders. He looked between his feet out the rear of the van. Four of the men were already wandering in an uncertain formation back toward the boat. He looked over his shoulder. One man was staying by the van, next to the driver's side. Harry saw no way he could get out from under so that he'd have the drop on all of them. And he sincerely doubted that they would take kindly to a homicide inspector who suddenly slithered into their midst.

But he couldn't just roll out and start shooting. He had no evidence that these smugglers were any worse than roughnecks looking to get rich quick on the ultimate high. From his vantage point at the end of the pier, he couldn't see inside the boat and after the first scream, he didn't hear anything more over the rock music. Harry would have to let the five smugglers name the tune he would play.

Harry slid to his right, pulling his body until it was completely clear of the van's underside. He pushed his .44 out in front of him, pointing it at the men trudging toward the yacht.

"Police!" he shouted. "Freeze."

As Harry expected, the name of the game suddenly became "kill the cop," then "cut and run." The quartet reacted to his voice like a flock of nuns meeting Jack the Ripper. Two raced at the yacht. Two others dived back for the other side of the van. All four started blasting at the spot they thought they heard the voice come from. Their only mistake was that they thought he would be standing. The bullets whipped over Harry's head as he shot the two men stampeding toward the yacht one

after the other.

His first slug hit the balding man at the crown of his head. The flesh erupted and the skull cracked with the sound a coconut makes when it is torn open. The corpse jumped into the air and fell facefirst on the disembarking platform. The second slug caught the bearded man high up his back, sending him colliding with the yacht's side. He slid down the wall to get caught between a pylon and the hull. The boat rocked on the water, crushing him like a hydraulic compressor.

Harry rolled to his feet just in time to see the lookout man lean around the front windshield with his gun aimed. He jumped back to the cover of the van as the lookout's shot grazed his ear. He pointed the .44 at the dark blue siding of the vehicle and pulled his cannon's trigger. The big gun bucked and the bullet passed through the first metal wall across the drugs, diagonally through the front windshield and into the side of the lookout's head, just in front of his ear. The man swung around as if he had just been punched by a combination of Ali, Joe Louis, and Rocky Marciano. He unconsciously threw his gun off the opposite side of the wharf, where Harry heard it clatter instead of splash.

Harry raced to the other side of the van around the front to see the brown-haired man running toward the wharf edge away from him.

"Hold it!" shouted the cop, putting his gun out in a classic position —both hands wrapped around the butt, his feet planted wide.

The man responded by leaping off the wharf. A second later, bullets began erupting up from underneath, right through the wharf's planking. Callahan didn't wait around for the brown-haired guy to get lucky. He ran to the other side of the pier, where the lookout had inadvertently thrown his gun. He jumped too, landing feet first in a small dinghy, tied to one of the pylons.

The brown-haired guy was across from him, stradling another row boat. He fired at Harry. The bullet ricocheted off the pylon. Harry's body rocked with the small boat, but his firing arm remained rock steady. He shot the guy in the heart. The guy flew back as if pulled by a wire and did a backward belly flop into the bay.

Harry heard the van's engine roar into life above him. Doing a quick mental inventory, he figured it had to be the blond leader trying to get away with the goods. As Harry remembered it, the blond must have pulled open the side door and jumped in when the cop had come around the other side of the vehicle. Then, when the brunette was holding Harry's attention, the blond slid into the front seat and got cracking.

Harry looked up. He wouldn't be able to climb back up onto the

pier in time to stop the van. He looked to his right and jumped. He caught onto the hull of an adjoining sailboat and pulled himself aboard. He raced across its bow and jumped onto the front of a cabin cruiser next door. From that elevated height, he leaped back onto the pier just as the van was roaring by.

Callahan got a glimpse of the blond driver through the passenger's window just as he thrust the Magnum out and pulled the trigger. Just before the scene sped past, Harry saw a glassy spider web grow out in a radius from the blond's ear. Taking no chances, Harry then fell to one knee, and with his last round, blew out the left rear tire.

The vehicle swerved crazily across the length of the pier, its front tires caught sideways on the planking, and then the van leaped, spinning, up into the air. It turned over one and a half times before scraping across the pier and leaping again. This time it landed half off the right side of the wharf. It twisted, a metal howl filling the night air, and then catapulted itself off the pier and against the dockside.

The van slammed against the reinforced land fill, then slid down into the water with a steaming hiss. It bobbed up to the surface afterward, a twisted, dead metal boat floating next to a cabin cruiser.

Harry slowly walked over to the scene, surveying the water for any survivors. He could see water bubbling into the van's cab from the big .44 bullet hole in the passenger's window. Beyond that he could see floating white pieces of cloth, floating hunks of green and gray plants and a few strands of red-flecked blond hair.

Callahan lowered his gun and was about to go check out the yacht when he heard his car radio crackling in the distance. He went back to his parked vehicle at a flat run. He made it just before dispatch signed off.

"Inspector seventy-one," he said into the mike, stretching it out the driver's window.

"Hey, Harry," came the voice of Sergeant O'Neill, who was handling the early morning calls. "We got something on that van you were looking for. A vehicle answering its description was found abandoned."

"Where?" Harry asked, breathing heavily.

"Chinatown," was the one-word answer.

CHAPTER

Three

The captain and his girl were extremely grateful. In return for untying them and promising police protection, the beaten young man gave Harry the run of the ship. As the shaken girl tended to her lover's wounds with a first-aid kit, Harry quickly rummaged through their sleeping quarters. Although the "captain" was shorter and slimmer than he, Callahan managed to find a brown corduroy jacket with black suede patches over the elbows which fit him. Maybe it was owned by the young man's father, whom the captain kept babbling about.

The pair had just returned from a two-week vacation after picking up a shipment of wrapped goods for the man's father—which had been secreted in the hull as per the pater's instructions. Given the contents of those wrappings, Harry hoped the jacket was the captain's dad. He wouldn't be needing it for a long time. Harry emerged, the .44 Magnum stuck in his belt.

"You'll be all right?" he asked the pair—the girl kneeling and dabbing the battered face of the seated young man.

The girl, looking little the worse for wear, nodded. "We'll be ok now. Thanks to you. Those men were going to kill us."

Harry thought about the five young corpses littered all over the east basin. "That's nice to know," he said under his breath. "I'll get some uniformed men down here fast. Don't go anywhere, all right?"

The girl nodded again. The man moaned. Harry went above deck, jumped off the yacht and trotted back up to his car. As he reached the throng of curious onlookers, two patrolmen were already working their way through the throng from the other side.

"I'm Inspector Callahan of the homicide office," Harry told them as they broke on through. "There's two witnesses in the yacht with the lights on, two D.O.A.'s on the pier and three more in the water. The corpses were pirates."

"Christ!" the first officer breathed, seeing the blood on the planking and the crumpled van in the water. "You got any idea what killed them?"

"I did," Callahan said, moving toward his car.

"Shit!" he heard the second man call after him. "You must be Dirty

Harry!"

He did not deign to reply to the correct guess. Nowadays it seemed as if he needed only to wave his gun and not his badge for identification. Leaving the messy scene to the rest of Frisco's finest, Harry pushed his auto into gear and shot off toward Chinatown. He took Jefferson to Hyde to Beach and then onto Columbus, which led him right to the east side of the Oriental center.

The streets were relatively clear, given that it was four-thirty in the morning. There was a bit more activity outside the Chinatown Wax Museum on Grant and California streets. As soon as he got into visual range, his car was stopped by some officers manning a police barricade. Harry saw the van parked in front of the museum, but he had to spend ten minutes convincing the boys in blue that he was one of them. His wallet, badge, and driver's license were back in his apartment, along with his jacket and speed loaders.

Finally, it got to the point that the patrolmen weren't sure whether to arrest him for carrying a cannon without proper I.D., driving without a license, or going on police business without a shield. Instead of doing any of these, they let him through. As they rationalized later, anyone looking like Harry who carried a .44 Magnum had to be either a cop or a very curious gunfighter.

Callahan approached the scene slowly, the hanging lanterns giving the misty street a wet glow in the early morning light. Sudden flashes of red and blue danced across his face from the silent, spinning turrets of the cop cars. The whole scene disquieted Harry. There were much too many officers at the scene to make it just an ordinary abandoned car. He got the sinking feeling that Suni might have been abandoned with the vehicle—both lifeless.

Cops were crawling all over the van and the museum entrance. As Harry grew near, the van's back doors suddenly flew open. The cop was taken by surprise, freezing in his tracks. He relaxed when he realized that the van was empty and dry, while the men bursting out were fingerprint specialists.

As soon as he assimilated this, the doors of the museum swung wide and two teams of paramedics wheeled out two covered bodies. Harry moved away from the van to catch the people just before they hauled the corpses into the waiting ambulance. Harry placed a hand on the first paramedic's shoulder.

"What have you got?" he asked blandly, his stomach boiling.

"Two Orientals," the medico replied. "A boy and a girl. The male had enough lead in him to make a set of barbells. As near as I can tell, the girl was raped and suffocated."

Harry pulled back the first sheet. What used to be a young Chinese face looked back up at him. Miraculously, the eyes were open and untouched. But the rest of the face looked like moldy red apple sauce. Someone had done a dance on this boy's face with a machine gun. Harry waved that one on, and had the second sheet-covered body served to him like a picky gourmet at a royal meal.

He pictured Suni's face underneath the covering and then pulled the sheet back. His fantasy and what he saw did not match. This was a young Chinese girl, whose normally pretty features were distorted by purple mounds of puffed-up skin. As if someone had inserted an air pump into her head.

The sight of the viciously murdered girl did a strange thing to Harry. Before he took the sheet off her face, he felt his tensed muscles loosen in fear, his eyes cloud in resignation, and his brain go slightly soggy with regret. As soon as he saw the young Chinese whom he didn't recognize, however, the adrenaline started throbbing through his veins once again. It wasn't over yet. Suni was still around somewhere. And hopefully, she was still alive.

Callahan dropped the white cover back down on the face. Requiring no other words, the medicos loaded the two stretchers up in one ambulance, making it look as if the two bodies were best pals staying overnight in bunk beds. As they closed the doors, leaving the pair's fate in the hands of the coroner, Harry felt an overwhelming desire for a woman.

Another Chinese girl, he decided. One that was a little older and a lot more experienced than the dead girl. A painted, curvaceous Chinese girl, skilled in the art of love-making. That's what he needed. And he knew just where to get it. He trotted back to his car, his mind set on a new plan of action.

Harry drove through and past the Chinatown that the tourist saw. He left the Americanized sections behind. After the great shake and bake of 1906, much of the Chinatown corruption had been wiped out, but some things always made a lot of money and always would. And no matter how well intentioned the revivalists, the redesigners, and the rebuilders were, vice would always have a comfortable home in San Francisco's Chinatown.

The pleasures of Grant Avenue were left behind. The dim, dismal back streets of the section had different pleasures to offer. These joys were not lit up by hanging lanterns and were not awash with souvenirs or kindly smiling Buddhas. No neon sign announced the attractions. No eager round-eyed tourists lined the streets, decked out in blue jeans and holding cans of cola.

Harry parked his car at the end of a thin, winding street crammed with tiny shops—one not catering to the tourist trade. Unlike the ornately decorated buildings along Chinatown's main drags, these stores were hardly more than glass-fronted boxes. And Harry knew that the Chinese characters stating their purposes on their windows —"shoe repair," "periodicals," "pharmacy"—were not truly detailing the source of their real income.

The cop found the mouth of an alley halfway down on the right side of the street. It was positioned in such a way that it seemed a permanent optical illusion. You could hardly see it unless you were right on top of it. With a casual look, it seemed to be no more than a regular, thin dead-end alley, ending with a plain, seemingly corroded wooden door on the left side of the far wall.

Harry knew better. He shifted his Magnum from his belt in front to his waistband in the small of his back. Then he moved cautiously down the thin pathway, remaining aware of the black, closed windows above him. He made it to the door without stopping, then knocked three times. When the partition opened a cloud of queasy-smelling smoke came with it. Through the slight crack made by the door opening, Harry could only see an ocean of glowing red light.

He saw nothing human in the crimson sea, but he heard a crackling high-pitched Chinese voice yapping at him. He jammed his foot in the door crack and pushed back with both hands. The door flew inward with very little effort. Its sweep disturbed the billowing clouds of smoke in the scarlet haze. Harry was a tall, glowing silhouette in the open doorway.

Callahan picked out some movement from within the bowels of the smoky room, but most of his attention was focused on the old, bent Chinaman weaving back and forth in front of him. The codger spat a few more sharp words in his native tongue, and then recognized Harry partly for what he was.

"American, eh?" he cackled. "It's late, American. Go away."

"I was sent here," said Harry. "They said I could find some fun."

The old Chinaman sized Harry up. "You must want it badly," he concluded. "Its very dangerous to be out on the city streets so late at night. Why you not come back later?"

"The streets are dangerous all the time," Harry said with a conviction born of experience. "I'm here now."

"So I see," the Oriental cackled, then suddenly grew serious and brittle. "No fun here, American. Only work. Expensive work."

"I'm willing to pay for what I get." Harry reached into his pocket and extracted a wad of bills. The ample roll was supplied by Harry's

own pocket money—which he never kept in his wallet—and by cash the smuggling ship's captain was willing to lend him after Harry found out the kidnapping van was found in Chinatown.

"So what kind work you want, American?" the codger mused, drinking in the money with his eyes as if he had X-ray vision. "A tall, straight man like you does not want to poison his body. He would want to use it, eh? Follow me."

The bent old caricature of a Chinaman led Harry through the first room, through a pair of curtains—one cloth, one beaded—and into a classic opium den, looking to be right out of a bad movie or men's magazine from the 1940's. Through another double curtain and Harry was standing before a line of painted Oriental Jezebels. The small, delicate-looking girls were done up as a bigot might have expected them to be.

All their faces were masterpieces of makeup; disguising their ages perfectly. In the dim red light, it was even possible that they were wearing extremely realistic masks; not one of their visages expressed anything but a single, flat emotion. One girl was decked out like the Dragon Lady—cigarette holder and all. Another was wearing the latest lingerie from "Victoria's Secret," including the garter belt, ultrahigh heels, and frilly, push-up, peek-a-boo bra. Another was outfitted like an Oriental schoolgirl, with pigtails, white shirt, pleated skirt, white socks and bobby-soxer shoes. Finally there was a full-fledged geisha girl—complete with wooden slat sandals.

"You have a preference?" asked the codger.

"I'll go traditional tonight," said Harry, pointing at the geisha. She bowed subserviently toward him. The cop figured she would take longer getting out of her uniform, giving him more time to set up his next move.

"Ah, Ling," the codger named her. "A wise choice. Now please. Enter the first room on your right. She will be in presently."

The old Chinaman pointed to an ornate, soot-covered white doorway to the right of Ling, the geisha girl. Harry looked down the length of his arm, then at the door, then back at the man's face. The codger was hunched over so all Harry saw was the top of his white-haired head. The cop nodded and went toward the door.

"Oh," said the Chinaman just before he reached it. "American." Harry turned. The codger was smiling and holding out his hand. Callahan walked slowly back and put the wad of cash in the thin, wrinkled, slightly quivering palm. The codger smiled and Harry went back to the door.

"American?" the codger called again, his voice even higher this

time, as if he were saying “aren’t you forgetting something?”

Harry stopped and slowly turned. The Chinaman was smiling even wider and humbly. “Your gun?” the codger said.

The old man was not as innocent as he seemed. Harry had to chalk it up to the corduroy jacket. His own clothes were altered so his piece wouldn’t make a crease in his outerwear no matter where he stuck it. Having little choice, he reached back, pulled the Magnum gingerly out and tossed it onto the seat of an overstuffed chair next to the Dragon Lady.

“All set?” he asked patiently, his hands out.

The Chinaman smiled and nodded. Harry entered the room. It was surprisingly big, considering the utility of all the other rooms. It was surprisingly sumptuous as well. It was decorated in the style of turn-of-the-century San Francisco, up to and including the unused gas lights on the wall. The room’s only present illumination came from the working fireplace on the left wall. The centerpiece of the room was the plush, big canopied bed. It sat like an overrich sacrificial altar in the middle of the rear wall.

The place was surprisingly comfortable. Harry felt unusually at ease in the room, as if he had been born a hundred years too late. He moved away from the door, taking off the corduroy jacket as he went. With the .44 gone, there was no longer any reason to keep it on. Throwing it on an antique chair between the bed and the fireplace, Harry started circling the room nonchalantly, looking as if he were merely checking out the furnishings, when actually he was searching for the peephole or bugging devices he knew had to be there. A prostitute’s privacy was a thing of the past. The best whorehouses now had video surveillance equipment to back up the girls.

Harry stopped when he heard the door open behind him. He was looking down the lamp on the table next to the bed when he heard the entrance. He turned, smiling, fully expecting to see Ling. He was not pleased when he saw three burly Chinese men carrying nunchakus instead.

The nunchaku was obstensibly a martial-arts training device. In use, however, it combined the best attributes of both a chain and two clubs. Or the worst attributes, depending upon whether one was the nunchaka or nunchakee. Essentially, it was two tapered foot-long clubs connected by a few inches of steel links. Bruce Lee had made them famous in his *Enter the Dragon* movie and now every hopeful kung fu killer wanted a pair.

Unfortunately, the three men facing Harry looked like they knew how to use them. And by the expressions on their faces, it looked like

Harry would have no choice but to see just how well.

Moving until he was midway between the chair and the middle of the bed, Harry looked upon the trio with a placid expression. “Now the way I see it,” he said quietly. “You guys can mess with me, and everybody is going to get hurt. So why don’t you just say your piece; I’ll take my gun and get out of here. You can keep the bullets and the money.”

The Chinamen weren’t buying. As soon as Harry had finished, the man on the left screamed a karate yell and charged, his nunchaku swinging up over his head, held by his right hand.

Harry immediately bent his right knee and dropped his shoulder so he fell away from the swinging club. At the same time he grabbed the topmost bed cover with his left hand and hurled it up in the air like a net. It was a perfect hurl. The blanket spread out like a hand and covered the top of the attacking man’s torso. The nunchaku slapped harmlessly on one of the canopy’s columns and Harry swung his right fist into the Chinaman’s covered jaw.

The crack of the club on the canopy was echoed by Harry’s hard punch, which dropped the first attacker like a side of beef. The middle Chinaman took no time in backing his fallen comrade up. He came in from Harry’s right, hoping to swing the nunchaku into the side of the cop’s ducking head. Only Callahan dropped completely onto the floor at that moment, letting the club whiz over his head. He rolled, and before the second man could retreat, Harry swung up and punched him right between the legs.

Harry felt the testicles and penis get smashed under his knuckles and the pained exhalation of air the man made when doubling over. Callahan wrenched his hand back and threw himself away from the second attacker’s contorted face. Landing on his back, he kicked both feet into the crippled Chinaman’s head. The bent-over attacker snapped straight and kept going, nearly knocking over the third man in the process.

The last Chinaman shouted, dodged to his left and ran at Harry from in front of the fireplace. While getting to his feet, Harry pushed the chair with his jacket on it over in front of the man. The third Chinese nimbly hopped over it, swinging the nunchaku as he came. Harry raised his arms and met the man halfway. He felt the nunchaku slam into his side and snake around across his back as his fingers sunk into the last man’s face.

As burly as the Chinaman was, he was no match for the weight and strength of Harry’s brawny, tightly muscled frame. Even though the Chinese was jumping forward, Harry’s thrust lifted him up and back.

Harry's weight broke the chair as he fell across it, but his straight arms and clawlike fingers sent the last man's head and shoulders into the fireplace.

The nunchakus were all but forgotten as the man's oily black hair burst into flames like a pile of hay hit by a meteor. He reared up, screaming, as the fire crawled across his clothes. Harry jumped up too, grabbing the flaming man by the shirt front and throwing him onto the bed. The cop then ripped all the bed covers out and flung them over the third Chinese to suffocate the flames. He wrapped the screaming man up like an egg roll and threw him back to the floor. He pushed the writhing body back and forth until his hair and flesh was smoldering.

At that moment, the door burst open again, and in came another Chinese with a fire extinguisher, followed by the codger who had sent him into the trap. The younger man doused the smoking hulk of sheets and blankets as Harry rose ominously toward the codger.

"Unh, unh, uh," said the old man, pointing Harry's .44 at the cop's chest. "What do you really want, American?"

"I want to see Cheh," Harry said between deep breaths. "Huang Cheh."

"Why didn't you say that before?" the codger demanded, his voice cracking.

"Would it have done any good?"

The codger shrugged. "Probably not. We would have sent these men after you in any case." The Chinese lowered the gun. "Follow me," he concluded.

Once more Harry followed the wizened old man as he was led out of the prostitution section, through some narrow, bulb-lit hallways and into an elevator at the end of the line. The codger accompanied him as they rose several floors. Finally the small, weathered elevator stopped, and the door creaked open to reveal one of the grandest, plushest, most ultramodern offices Harry had ever seen.

There was a thick white carpet on the floor with glorious rugs on one wall and a breathtakingly beautiful metal sculpture of a dragon taking up most of the opposite wall. A long curtain covered the far wall, and in front of that was a large, shining desk. The high-backed chair behind the desk was empty.

The old codger entered first, wandering off to the left, and Harry followed, impressed by the obvious wealth of the inner office. He looked to his right to see the wall next to the elevator crammed full of the latest electronic equipment. There was a stereo outfit, a projection TV, rows of video screens, several videotape machines, a video disc

system, a home computer linkup, and every other imaginable gadget, many not yet available in this country on the retail market.

Many of the screens were on, revealing what was going on in all the den's rooms. Harry saw gambling, whoring, and drug taking. His eyes settled on the row of prostitutes plying their wares. The sets were in color and it was like watching all the triple-X movies ever made all at once. Harry shook his head in amazement. He just didn't get out enough, he told himself, just like he always did when situations like this cropped up.

Not wanting to look away particularly, Harry asked, "Where's Cheh?"

"Right here, Harry," came the Chinatown crime lord's voice.

The cop spun around to see that the left section of the wall next to the elevator had been pushed back to reveal a combination bar and bathroom—minus the toilet. The old codger had straightened up, removed his false set of teeth, pulled off the wisps of hair under his nose and chin, then tugged off the white wig. Although hunks of spirit gum and latex makeup still hung onto his face, the caricature Chinaman had undeniably transformed himself into Huang Cheh.

"I've been here all the time," the crime boss informed him with a slight smile.

Harry refused to react to the charade. "You've changed," he said deadpan.

"It has been sometime since you visited me last," Cheh explained, moving toward the desk while pulling his fake eyebrows off. "And these are strange times we are living in. Have a seat, Harry."

Cheh moved around to his chair behind the desk as the cop walked up and took a red plush one to the left of the Chinaman's position. It was a long time since Harry had last seen him. That was shortly after Cheh had arrived in this country a broken, scarred man. The Saigon, Tokyo, and Hong Kong crime hierarchy had not been nice to him. Their retribution against this second-rate hood had continued once Cheh had tried to escape to the States.

Through pure chance, Harry had been in Chinatown and accidentally saved Cheh from a group of thugs. At that time, the then drunken, terrified man had sworn eternal thanks to the lanky, laconic cop. Callahan had put Cheh's pledge down as the ravings of a man at the end of his rope, but almost right after that incident, Cheh's luck began to change. As time went on, he gained more and more power in Chinatown while Harry battled his way up the police force's chain of command.

Harry had reached his apex as inspector. With his violent record

and reputation for biting ass rather than kissing it, it was highly unlikely that he would get much further. Cheh, on the other hand, just kept getting stronger, a fact that put a severe strain on their relationship. Harry had accepted an invitation to sup with the new crime lord only to make it clear at the meal that he had no intention of being friends with the guy. He said that he would use him if it ever became necessary and warned him that if Cheh ever overstepped his boundaries, Callahan would be on him like a ton of bricks.

Cheh considered it bad manners to speak of such things at the dinner table, but he promised to try and forgive the cop. Their previous parting could have been termed frosty at very best.

But time seemed to heal those wounds. Harry had been impressed how careful Cheh had been over the years. He was practical and effective, never letting his business dealings lead to an innocent injury. He treated his people well and annihilated anyone who sought to rock his profitable boat.

“You’ll want this, no doubt,” Cheh said, tossing Harry his .44 as he sank into his chair. Harry caught it to find that it was still fully loaded. “So to what do I owe this unusual visit?” Cheh continued from behind his shiny desk. “Has the time come to finally ‘use’ me?”

Harry laid the Magnum on his lap. He was sure that its return wasn’t merely a show of trust. He harbored no doubts that there were enough offensive weapons in Cheh’s desk to turn him to ashes before he even aimed the revolver. “You said it was strange times,” Harry answered, turning the question into another question. “I need to know what is going on in Chinatown. I need to know why the crime lord is answering the door disguised as a dirty old man. I need to know why two Chinese teenagers were brutally murdered at the wax museum tonight. I need to know why a Japanese woman was kidnapped by three masked terrorists on her way to my apartment.”

Huang Cheh listened to Harry with a completely empty face. As the cop talked, the Chinese had made a pyramid with his fingers and gently placed the two forefingers to his lips. When Callahan had finished speaking, Cheh remained silent for several seconds, his eyes looking right through the American. When he finally spoke, it was as if he hadn’t heard a word Harry said.

“I am sorry about sending those three men to you downstairs. I hope you can forgive me.”

Harry was not puzzled by Cheh’s response. The fact that he was talking at all was a good sign. The Chinese were a race to whom respect and “face” meant everything. No Chinese worth his salt came right out and said anything. All explanations had to be tempered and

cushioned with nonincriminating words.

"But it *is* a strange time," Cheh continued absently, looking from Harry over to the video screens. "A time when a peaceful man cannot be sure whether he is safe from attack even in his own home. A time when a man must test even his friends to be sure of no treachery. A time when even the highest ranking of men must mask themselves to avoid danger."

Harry had to hand it to the crime boss. Only the most vicious and unprofessional killer would murder a seemingly harmless old codger who answered the door. They would charge through to the inner office to find it empty or filled with a small army of angry bodyguards.

"The murders," Harry quietly nudged him. "The kidnapping."

"There were more than just two murders in Chinatown tonight," Cheh intoned. "Nine men were shot down in a corner store tonight, all but one of them innocent of any wrongdoing. One of them wasn't even engaged in some pleasurable, harmless games of skill. It was messy. It was ugly and unnecessary. It was the act of a naughty little boy desperate for attention."

Harry put it together. Someone had wiped out one of Cheh's nickle-and-dime gambling dens. "How does that tie in with the wax museum murders?" Harry wanted to know.

"The boy killed there was the nephew of the store owner," Cheh said in a remarkably straightforward fashion. "He was known to spend some time in his uncle's employ. The girl was another innocent. A museum tour guide. She was one with the boy's heart."

"He escaped," Harry reasoned. "And went to get his girlfriend. The killers followed him there." Cheh remained silent. "Why?" Harry demanded. "This is not the Chinese style. There haven't been many callous slaughters of innocent bystanders in the skirmishes of the past."

"These are strange times," Cheh repeated once again. "These are not Chinese gangs fighting each other for territory, using teenagers as our soldiers. These are Japanese fighting for recognition of their place in the underworld. *Nihonmachi."* Huang Cheh said the last word as if spitting out a particularly distasteful hunk of food.

Callahan reacted to his vehemence. He recognized the last word as the Oriental translation for "Japantown," the section of the city between Post and Buchanan streets, which was completely overshadowed by the five-tiered "Peace Pagoda," built to "convey the friendship and goodwill of the Japanese to the people of the United States"—as it says on the plaque outside it. The area was so new, so

clean, and so small that Harry was about to react to Cheh's allegation with vehement denial. Then he realized that it was no way to get anything from the crime lord. Instead, his next words were soft and reasonable.

"That is indeed strange," he said. "If a new underworld faction, using such violent tactics, was to appear in that area, one would think that the police would have at least a glimmer of it."

"Their core is not in San Francisco," Cheh explained. "Their evil has just touched this city."

"So where are they from?"

Cheh returned to his inscrutable self. With a minute shrug, he said, "That is not my concern." Harry translated that to mean "I do not know." Oblivious to his hidden meaning, Cheh continued diffidently. "I seek to protect my own from their violence and evil."

"Come on, Huang," Harry said with a smirk, leaning forward. "Why did they destroy your crib?"

Cheh leaned back in his chair, put his fingers together again, and lectured to the ceiling. "The two Chinese factions utilize the front of two youth gangs: the Thunderfists and Tiger Claws."

Harry agreed with that. These two street gangs were barely controlled by the China-based crime families. Cheh was the top-ranking representative of the group who used the Thunderfists. For years these two gangs went after each other, sometimes with, but mostly without, the family blessing. They were the ones out on the street, in the line of fire, making sure protection was paid, gambling was safe, the whores unmolested, and their territory was unsullied by a member of the rival gang. In fact, it was probably three Thunderfists whom Harry had beaten downstairs.

"The Thunderfists are more powerful in San Francisco," Cheh went on, "but more centralized than the Tiger Claws, whose strength stretches across the country." Harry was impressed by the man's candor. The situation was taking on graver and more important overtones as he learned more about it.

"It was they who first crossed paths with the newly born Nihonmachi underworld," Cheh continued. "And it was they, the Tiger Claws, who felt most threatened by the Japanese crime families' flourishing. They have fought them every chance they got. The Thunderfists have remained uninvolved until the Nihonmachi evil reached into its very heart.

"I offered to aid the Tiger Claws any way I could," Cheh summed up softly. "Tonight's murders were a warning to stay away . . . to remain uninvolved. It is a warning I must consider. Fighting two wars may

not be as smart as waiting to take on the victor."

The crime lord remained silent after that, still staring up at the ceiling. Harry waited until almost a minute had passed. "And the kidnapping?" he finally inquired.

"I shall always be indebted to you for saving my life," Cheh answered along a perpendicular route. "But I feel that primary allegiance to you has been spent. I will no longer be available to you unless it is in the direst of emergencies. You will no longer be welcome here. If you wish to meet me, perhaps a meeting could be arranged in another place. I must ask you to leave now. There are pressing matters of far greater importance to be considered."

Harry heard a noise behind him. When he turned, seven men had entered the room. They stood along the back wall. Even if Harry emptied his gun at them, there would be one more to take him on. Callahan looked back at Huang, who was still studying the air above him.

"The day is still young," Harry said lightly. "I may take a notion to visit some Tiger Claw territory. You wouldn't happen to have a .44 Magnum shoulder holster I could use."

Cheh took a moment to casually signal the man nearest the bar. That man opened a cabinet near the floor, rummaged through it for a second, then pulled out a standard .44 holster. He threw it to Harry.

"Think of it as a reward," Cheh suggested, looking at the cop again. "For your fine performance downstairs."

Harry strapped it on on the way down the elevator. The last thing he remembered about Cheh's headquarters on the way out was Ling's face—infinite with regret.

Violent reverberations of their meeting stayed with Harry even after he had gotten into his car and continued cruising the streets. What Cheh had said with his refusal to answer the kidnapping question was that Harry's guess was as good as his. But within the crime lord's last speech were the insidious seeds of great trouble to come. If, by some outside chance, the Thunderfists and Tiger Claws did decide to team up, the police all over the country would be facing a far greater enemy than ever before.

In the major urban centers, at least, the Chinatown underworld would take on a solidarity rivaling the Italian families. It would have close to the same effect that the Irish and Jewish criminals had when they joined the Mafia. In the long run, it might be better for the general peace, but law and order would become a ludicrous phrase. The police would be essentially powerless against them. The

underworld would be far more organized, wealthy, and effective.

But if the two Chinese factions did not unite, the short-range situation promised to be very bloody, with a lot of innocent bystanders getting mown down along with the Oriental soldiers. The body count was already too high, with the most important body—Suni's—still unaccounted for. From a personal as well as professional point of view, Harry had to get a handle as to where the museum killers and Suni's kidnappers hailed from.

He was already certain the crimes were interconnected. It was too much of a coincidence that the kidnappers would leave the van outside the scene of the murder. They must have switched vehicles after the wax museum killings, then switched back after snatching Suni. Interviewing passersby as to what cars they saw parked outside the museum would be a waste. And if Cheh couldn't tell him anything more, being on the outskirts of the skirmish, maybe one of the main armies could.

He pulled his car up outside the "Village Hwa Seung Yuan" restaurant—a tiny hole-in-the-wall corner eatery that looked completely unappetizing from the outside. The appearance was purposeful but deceiving. It had some of the best and most authentic Chinese cooking in the city, but the proprietors didn't want just anyone coming in.

It was near dawn, but the front door was still open and Harry could see some activity inside. He pulled the metal screen door toward him and slipped past the wood-and-glass door which was held back by a tarnished tiger door stop. The establishment was built like a triangle, with its crown at the door. From there it spread out on two levels. The cop stood on the first level, a hot steamy kitchen/bakery section, where round, perspiring men toiled over pots and stoves. Recessed back on three semicircular steps was the eating section, crammed with mismatching tables and chairs of many different shapes.

At this time of day, about the only people inside were Chinese whores and their pimps, along with a pocket or two of Tiger Claw members. In spite of the small number of diners, there was good reason for the kitchen to be busy. They were preparing for the early morning rush of workers who picked up the fresh pastries and rolls on the way to their Chinatown offices.

Harry moved purposely through the aromatic steam toward the eating area. He ignored the cooks and waiters until one roly-poly Chinese with a round face cut him off in the middle of the floor.

"We closed now," he said politely but harridly. "Come back couple a' hours. Ok?"

Harry motioned toward the four women and six men scarfing down food in the other room. “They’re eating,” he said defensively.

“Kitchen closed,” the Chinese countered. “You go away now.”

“I just want to sit down for a second,” Harry told him reasonably. “I won’t be any trouble.”

The Chinese looked worriedly from Harry to a young man who was sitting in the far corner with three other teens. The cop saw the kid nod almost imperceptively.

“Ok,” said the Chinese back to Harry. “Then you go. Come back later, ok? Get nice cookies, ok?”

Harry smiled. The Chinese looked like a slanted-eye “Poppin’ Fresh.” “Ok,” he said, nudging past him toward the dining area. Harry slowly mounted the three stairs, taking good long looks at the patrons. They all seemed oblivious of him while they held steaming bowls up to their mouths and shoveled stuff in with chopsticks, but Harry could see them sizing him up furtively. He took a seat in between the table with four hookers and their man and the corner table with three Tiger Claws. He could see two other gang members sitting by the window in front. They were the lookouts and backup men in case of any trouble. Harry was intent on seeing just how useful they were.

The cop started patting his various pockets as if he was trying to find something. He dug into his jacket pockets, patted his shirt pocket, and then made a rather elaborate show of realizing that he could use the table’s paper napkin to write on. Then he went through the patting routine again, seemingly trying to find something to write with.

He leaned toward the hooker table and asked, “Anybody got a pen? Or a pencil? Something to write with?” The first girl turned around, then turned away quickly, moving her chair closer to her friend’s and shaking her head no. The girl next to her spoke the sentiments aloud. “No.” The third began to rummage through her pocket-book until the pimp signaled for her to cool it. Harry saw the man who had initially stopped him at the door grab a ball-point from the cash register.

Callahan reached under his jacket and wrapped his hand around the Magnum butt. “Never mind,” he called out. “I found one.” Then he pulled the .44 from Cheh’s holster and pointed it in back of him right into the face of the Tiger Claw who had nodded.

The artifice worked perfectly. He had established the fact that he was looking for a pencil, so no one thought he’d pull out a gun. Even if they thought it was possible he was packing a piece, they probably didn’t think he would be stupid enough to call attention to himself and then whip it out. But Harry was stupid enough. The big barrel of the .44 rested comfortably on the end of the lead Tiger’s nose.

The two gang members by the window leaped up as if an electric bolt had zapped through their chairs. The two guys at the table with the threatened teen reared back, then remained extremely still.

"Now everyone relax," Harry ordered. "This is just a routine investigation into the murder of two young Chinese at the wax museum last night."

Having set the stage, Harry got up from his chair, wrapped his free hand in the lead gang member's shirt and bodily lifted him out from behind the table and onto the floor—keeping his Magnum pointed at the teen's nose at all times. The move was practical for two reasons. First, it showed everyone just how strong he was. And second, it got the guy away from his friends, who could be holding all manner of debilitating weapons under the table top.

As soon as the kid's feet hit the floor, Harry grabbed a handful of straight black hair and propelled him toward the door, the gun now pushed into the Tiger Claw's back. Harry was counting on the surprise factor to get the kid out of the restaurant and into his car. There was no way on God's green earth that the kid was going to answer questions in front of what served as his peer group. Answering any question of a "round-eye," even "what time is it?" brought derision and shame upon the gang members. But if Harry could get him alone, he might be able to get answers to his very nonpolice questions, so the rest of the gang would never know.

It almost worked. Harry had nearly gotten the kid out the door when he noticed two smirking Tiger Claws blocking him from the other side of the screen door. Both were standing, side by side, with their toes against the bottom of the partition, making it impossible for Harry to get out easily. Callahan didn't bother talking. He knew there was nothing he could say now. They had called his bluff. He couldn't legally or morally shoot anybody. He couldn't force his way out without a fight. And there was no way he was about to get caught sandwiched in between the gang.

Harry moved back quickly, taking the kid with him. He backed around the pastry counter as the two Tiger Claws came slowly through the door and the four diners walked slowly down the steps. The cooks and waiters scattered. Harry quickly checked the layout for details. The ovens were to his right. The stoves were behind him. The register and display counter was to his left—as was the door and windows out on the street.

Callahan kept his tight grip on the kid's hair. He pushed the Magnum against the side of the kid's jaw so everyone could see it. Its appearance did nothing to deter the half-dozen teens approaching him. As he watched, two of them pulled out a ko-buda tonfa; which

was another martial-arts trainer that could double as a billy club. Made of hardwood, it was a thick stick with a handle protruding from the side.

Another kid pulled a tokusho keibo from his back pocket. This was an Oriental police baton. It was like a switchblade club. When closed, it was six and a half inches long. The kid held it up for a second, then tapped the button at its base. The telescopic design sprang three inner portions out to a full length of twenty and a half inches. The message was clear. Go ahead. Do your worst. Kill the kid if you want. Whatever you do, you're not getting out of here easy.

Harry heard the heavy breathing of the kid he was holding. He heard the quiet footsteps of the approaching Tiger Claws. He heard the bubbling of the boiling tureen of soup behind him. He saw the four dining Tiger Claws spread out as they approached and come together in a pack again as they neared. He waited until they started squeezing past the counter.

Then he brought the .44 up sharply and slammed it down on the lead kid's head. He let the gun fall with the Tiger Claw. It was all but useless to him now. Besides, he had something else to occupy his hands with. As the kid and Magnum dropped, the Tiger Claws surged forward. Callahan twisted and grabbed the handles of the soup pot. With nearly an arm-wrenching pull, he lifted it off the stove and hurled it at the attacking teens.

The boiling hot soup surged over the tureen's lip and splashed directly down upon the first three gang members. They screamed in pain and shock, falling to the sides and back. The heavy pot slammed into the fourth kid's chest, knocking him over. The pot bounced and crashed into the pastry display case, sending broken glass spinning across the floor.

The two teens left standing reacted with savagery. The fifth swung his metal club at Harry, but the cop was already ducking down to retrieve his gun. The club was a better trick than it was a weapon. At more than twenty inches, it was too long for the small restaurant. The tip got caught on the stove's lip. Harry reached up and wrenched the thing out of the kid's hand. Then he stabbed back with it in a sharp, jabbing motion, first catching the kid in the nose and then the eye. He stumbled back, tripping over the fourth kid, who was trying to get up after the pot had hit him.

The sixth kid swung the ko-budo tonfa at Harry's head as Harry swung his .44 at the ko-budo tonfa. The cop's gun blocked the blow and then Callahan slammed the baton just over the sixth kid's ear. The kid went down, slammed against the edge of the display case, bounced back, collided with the upright oven and then fell for good.

The Tiger Claw who had gotten hit with the pot found his feet again. He took one look at his five friends, writhing and sleeping on the ground, looked up at Harry's still figure—standing amid the wreckage with his Magnum at his side—and then ran out of the restaurant as fast as he could.

Harry shook his head. Kids shouldn't play with matches. And if they couldn't stand the heat, they should get out of the kitchen. The cop figured he only had a limited time left in Chinatown. If and when that kid came back, he'd be bringing a lot of Tiger Claws with him. But he wasn't about to drag the leader in and have the poor child start screaming police brutality. Harry would just have to dispense with legality and dispense a little street justice.

He reached down and grabbed a handful of the leader's hair again. He hadn't hit the kid hard enough to put him out for long, and sure enough, as he pulled, the kid groaned and responded. Harry slipped the .44 into its holster, grabbed the kid's arm, wrenched it up his back and whirled the kid around so that his stomach was against the stove. Then he pushed down his head so his face was hovering over the open flame which had been heating the soup.

"There's nobody around to back you up now, punk," Harry told the Tiger Claw through clenched teeth. "And I don't give a shit if you leave here without a face or not. Answer my questions or get fried."

Having a code of life was a lot easier than living up to it. This kid, this high-ranking Tiger Claw, had always thought that he could handle anything that was thrown at him. And up until now, that had been true. But now his face was just a few inches from a searing hot flame. A flame that was already frying his rapidly blinking eyes and crisping his eyebrows. He felt a pain unlike those inflicted by blades, chains, and clubs. He suddenly felt overwhelmingly inclined to answer any question the tall cop asked of him.

"Who killed the two Chinese at the wax museum?" Harry demanded, pushing the kid's head closer to the flame.

"Ni . . . Nihonmachi hitmen," the kid heard himself saying.

"Where do they come from?"

"All over. New York, L.A . . ."

"Where did these three come from?" Harry growled, pushing the head down again.

"Chicago!" the kid yelled, trying to pull away. "Chicago, I swear!"

"How do you know?"

"The orders come from there. The Nihonmachi headquarters is in Chicago."

“What about the kidnapping?” Harry asked in a different voice. It was a softer, more intense tone.

The kid paused until Harry started pressing down on his head again. “What kidnapping?” the kid squealed, confused. “I don’t know what you’re talking about!”

“The kidnapping of the Japanese girl!” Harry yelled. “Did the Chinese do it as revenge? Was she some kind of warning to the Nihonmachi?” With every question, Harry pressed.

“I tell you, I don’t know about any kidnapping!” the kid yowled, his face closer to the flame than ever before. “I’d know about it if the Tiger Claws did it. I swear! Maybe the Thunderfists. Check the Thunderfists!”

Harry pulled the kid abruptly up and hurled him against the back wall. The kid hit head first and slid slowly down to the glass-, pastry-, and soup-splattered floor. His eyes crossed and fuzzed, but he didn’t lose consciousness.

Harry stepped around the broken counter and moved toward the now open door. As he neared, the kid he had jabbed in the eye found his feet and stumbled in front of the cop, trying to maintain a kung fu stance. Harry pushed his fist in between the kid’s wavering arms and sent him to the floor again with a devastating punch. The kid hit the tile and slid all the way to the front window.

Without pausing Harry went outside to the deserted streets, got into his car and headed toward home.

CHAPTER

Four

Police and reporters were crawling all over his apartment house when Harry arrived at dawn. His parking garage blocked by two video vans, he parked around the corner and slipped in by the fire escape. The presiding cops inside recognized him and let him shave, shower, and change. Harry left the way he had come, wearing a dark green tweed jacket, a thick cotton button-down shirt, a plaid tie, a brown sweater vest, matching slacks, and his own Lawman leather shoulder holster.

Once he arrived at the Justice Building, however, there was no fire escape he could use to avoid the veritable army of reporters that charged him. Ever since the press had discovered what great copy he made during the "Scorpio" mass-murder case more than a decade ago, they hadn't missed an opportunity to paint him into a corner. And this was no exception. In fact, this situation was made to order. A kidnapped woman. A young man shot on the street. The escape vehicle found at the scene of a double murder. And the massacre of five "alleged" drug smugglers. Perfect, just perfect.

Harry walked right toward the mass of microphones, video cameras, lights, and note pads. The two opposing factions—Harry and the reporters—converged on the bottom step of the front entrance.

"Inspector Callahan," came the first shouted question Harry could hear over all the other shouted questions, "why did you kill the young boy outside your apartment?"

"Fuck you," said Harry lightly as if he was saying "nice day."

"Were you and the girl who was kidnapped lovers, Inspector?" came another question, along with a mike that was stuck right under his nose.

"Suck cock," said Harry with a friendly smile, waving at the still-photographers.

"Inspector," came a third voice, "don't you think murdering five men who just want to sell pot is a little severe?"

"You're a motherfucker," Harry replied breezingly, three-quarters up the steps.

"Inspector Callahan," came a stern female voice as he neared the front doors, "don't you think you have a responsibility to the people of

this city to explain your actions?"

Harry reacted as if the question got to him. He slowed, a concerned look on his face, then turned to face the mob of reporters with his hands raised for silence.

"A statement," one demanded of him. "A statement!"

Harry waited until they had all grown quiet and all the pencils and tape recorders were at the ready.

Then, with an abnormally wide smile, he said, "You all eat shit. Thank you."

With that, Harry slipped inside, accompanied by the sounds of teeth gnashing, pencil breaking, and hair ripping. Harry had spent too many years as the abused, used, misquoted butt of the allegations, secondhand rumors, wild guesses, and assumptions that passed for "electronically gathered news" nowadays. There wasn't even safety in saying "no comment." The TV reports and papers would edit it in such a way that he still looked guilty as hell.

Harry had learned his lesson hard, but he had learned it well. He had discovered the one surefire way not to appear on screen or in print was to swear so grieviously that the reporters wouldn't dare use it. Add that to a wonderfully cheerful smile for the still-photographers so no newspaper reader would believe he was being asked serious questions, and there was the foolproof Dirty Harry style of noninterviews.

His reception on the seventh floor was about as gracious. Inside room 750—the homicide suite—the rest of the detectives reacted to him as if he had just come back after a drunken binge. Some looked heavenward. Others looked in the opposite direction, shaking their heads, and others shrugged at him, as if saying "what can you do?" As he turned into his cubicle his long-time friend and occasional partner, Frank DiGeorgio, pulled his forefinger across his throat, his teeth clenched.

Strewn across Harry's blotter were enough messages to start papering his walls. Each said about the same thing, but with increasing amounts of intensity. The basic message was: "Go to the head office. Do not pass 'Go,' do not collect two hundred dollars."

Lieutenant Al Bressler was waiting for him. Harry's immediate superior was a tough old pro, like Callahan, except that he harbored a slight streak of fear that kept him firmly under the thumb of the higher-ups. Unlike Callahan, he was worried about his pension and his retirement. These concerns had taken their physical toll on the lieutenant. He was only a few inches shorter than Harry, but looked even more because of his slightly stooped shoulders and a posture

which said he'd been carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders for too long.

In addition, the vests of his three-piece suits were getting strained by the spare tire that was slowly but surely turning from a "bias ply" into a "steel-belted radial." His longish black and gray hair was unusually unkempt this morning and his normally calm brown eyes were bloodshot.

"You know what you are, Callahan?" Bressler cracked without looking up, as soon as Harry entered and closed the door behind him. "You're a fucking magnet, that's what you are," the Lieutenant answered before Harry had a chance to speak. He looked up then and rose from behind his desk, his fists flat on the surface. "Wherever you go, whatever you do, crime seems irresistibly attracted to you. Violence is your lover, Harry. As soon as we take you away from it, put you on a harmless fact-gathering detail, it comes looking for you, leaving bodies from your house to Chinatown and back."

"I didn't ask for trouble, Lieutenant," Harry said.

"That's what so incredible, Harry," Bressler replied. "I know that. I know you don't go out of your way to find trouble. It just seems to find you. But try to explain that to Captain Avery. Try to explain that to Captain McKay. Try to explain that to the chief and the commissioner! They seem to think you're some kind of goddamn Charles Bronson in *Death Wish,* for Christ's sake!"

"Well, it's not like my file is full of saving cats from trees," Harry admitted.

"You've got a tiger by the tail this time, Harry," Bressler said, growing serious. "The drug smugglers were a clean bust. Those guys were suspected of murdering several crewsful of pleasure boaters, but the guy you shot outside your apartment could be trouble."

"What do you mean?" Harry asked.

"The coroner says he was Jap. As near as I can figure he must be a member of one of these Oriental street gangs that have been driving us crazy all these years. You know the setup, Harry. It's a closed society in Chinatown. We couldn't do anything about the mess down there if we wanted to. Hell, it's better if we don't! We start messing around and a lot of innocents'll get hurt."

"It looks like they're already beginning to," Harry reminded him.

"And that's what's worrying me," Bressler said, coming around to sit on the edge of his desk. "These guys probably grabbed this Michelle girl for reasons all their own. I can't begin to figure it out. You lived in the same building, Harry. You got any ideas?"

Harry thought about it. His private life was his own business. He didn't talk about it to anyone. No one knew he and Suni were occasional lovers. The only reason one of the reporters asked is that reporters always wanted to aggravate their target. It had been a lucky guess.

But Harry now had enough information to safely assume that Suni was taken by the Nihonmachi underworld for some reason having to do with their fight for attention and power. But as far as he could tell, there was little or nothing the police force could do about it. The girl stood a better chance without an army of cops seeking to clean up Japantown, but with one enforcer who couldn't give a shit about gang wars and just wanted to rescue her.

"No," he lied to his immediate superior. "No ideas."

"Well, whatever way it pans out," Bressler went on, looking over Harry's shoulder through the office window at the small army of detectives trying to sort out the mass of murders on their rosters, "it's not our headache." He looked back at Callahan pointedly. "You read me, Inspector?" he asked. "This is Missing Persons' baby. And . . ." the lieutenant checked his watch, "in about sixteen hours the FBI will come in. Let them handle it, is that clear?"

Harry scowled. Rather than answering, he threw a curve ball into the conversation. "What about the Chinatown murders? That's not a Missing Persons case."

Bressler stood up, fixing Harry with an impatient stare before turning back toward his seat. As he took up his position behind the desk, he pulled a sheet of paper from his top drawer. "Very true, Inspector," he said formally. "I've already set up a homicide task force to look into it. Your name is not on the list." Bressler threw down the paper and ran his hands through his hair. Callahan, could see it wasn't easy for him.

"Come on, Harry," he finally said, all rigidity out of his voice and demeanor. "It's for your own good. You know how these Oriental street gangs operate. All that shit about maintaining face and seeking revenge for shame. Well, you just shot one right in the back. You take a step into Chinatown and your life won't be worth a plug yen."

"Lieutenant," Harry replied calmly, "the man I shot was Japanese. The Chinese hate the Japanese's guts. I'll probably get a ticker-tape parade in Chinatown." The bravado was all for the lieutenant's benefit. His killing a Japanese terrorist would probably not balance out the damage he did in the brothel and restaurant.

Bressler leaned back, throwing his hands up. "Chinese, Japanese, is there really that much difference? They're all crazy for vengeance. I

really think you ought to lay low for a while, Harry. How about a week off?"

Callahan brought the talk back to its main subject. "Any positive I.D. on the man I shot?"

"None," Bressler begrudgingly admitted. "Yet. But you know how close-mouthed the Orientals can get. See nothing, know nothing."

"In this case, it's true," Harry said with conviction. "You're not going to find anything in San Fran's Japantown, Lieutenant, because the Japanese here have too much to lose by allowing this kind of thing to go on. The Japanese who kidnapped the girl were out-of-town talent."

"All right, Inspector, that's enough," Bressler said flatly. "You don't know anything for sure and there's no way this department is going to let you continue with the investigation. I want you out of town too, Inspector. I thought I could reason with you, get you to agree to take some time off, but you seem to think you're a goddamn member of *The Untouchables*. You're taking a vacation, Callahan. Starting now. And that's an order."

Harry couldn't believe how well it worked out. He was planning to lead up to asking for some leave, but the lieutenant had beat him to it. But he kept his face stoic and replied with a simple "Yes, sir."

Bressler didn't like it when Harry called him "sir." It reminded him just how vulnerable he was to the screaming from upstairs in the department. "Look, Harry," he said apologetically. "With you gone for a while, it'll give everybody a chance to cool down and see straight. The press will get off the department's back and the department will get off my back. I promise you. If we don't make any progress by the time you get back, I'll reapproach the commissioner about putting you on the case. But for now, enjoy yourself. Go on a little trip, ok?"

Harry allowed himself a little smile. "Ok," he replied, turning to go.

"Callahan," Bressler called after him as he reached the lieutenant's door. Harry turned. "You, uh, have any idea where you might be going?"

Harry understood what lay behind the question. If Bressler knew where he was, he would know where to find him in case of emergency. And if he knew where he was, he could guarantee his superiors that Callahan would stay out of their hair. At least for a couple of days.

"I hear there's a lot of good Irishmen in Chicago," Harry told the lieutenant. "And a lot of beautiful women. I think I'll check out the Windy City."

Bressler smiled with relief. Harry smiled back. What he didn't mention was the city's Oriental population, nor the one particular beautiful woman he was looking for.

The plane took three hours to get from San Francisco Airport to Chicago's O'Hare Airport. In that time, Harry tried to ignore the little plastic pouches of nuts, the little plastic-covered sandwiches, the little plastic glasses of booze and the little plastic smiles of the flight attendants. Instead, he tried to assimilate as much as he could about the Windy City. In three hours, he found the place had some things in common with his home town—most primarily a devastating natural disaster. In Chicago's case, it was the Great Fire of 1871, after which the city was rebuilt brick by brick.

In the twenties, the city's rebirth was interrupted by Prohibition and the gang violence that was brought to a head by Al Capone. Four years after the St. Valentine's Day Massacre, Chicago celebrated its centennial with its second world's fair. Before the modern economic crunch set in, Mayor Richard Daley set about leveling the slums and giving rise to a spanking new Chicago.

He didn't completely succeed, and now the new city government had to contend with ridiculous transit problems and vicious racial tensions. In the three hours of flight time, Harry got a general idea of the city's layout and history while some of Chicago's finest got prepared for his arrival. As Callahan had learned in the past, news of his movements traveled fast.

After the plane had touched down and he had walked the long tunnel to the disembarker's lounge, he found two big airport officials waiting for him. It was no coincidence. Both men had the look of practiced assurance people got in occupations that incorporated possible violence. Their hands were crossed in front of their crotches, their eyes were half-closed and small, smug smiles hung just below their noses.

"Inspector Callahan?" one asked as Harry moved toward them. "Inspector Harry Callahan?" The San Francisco cop nodded and slowed. As he did so, the two wide airport men, wearing official O'Hare jackets, positioned themselves on either side of him. Although neither Chicagoan was as tall as Harry, together they looked like half the front line of the Bears' football team.

"Please come with us," said the other man reasonably. Harry saw no other choice, so without a word, the trio broke off from the rest of the passengers, who were finding relatives and friends or going in search of buses, rent-a-cars or taxis, and marched down the clean, bright

hallways into the airport's bowels.

Somebody must've been pretty busy with the phone while he was packing and flying, Harry figured. Somebody was either anxious to keep very close tabs on him or very worried about what he might do. Harry's two companions chaperoned him to a tiny room by the custom's agents—the little gray, soundproofed cells where folks were known to do strip searches and find all manner of illegal goods.

Inside, the room was one long table and no chairs. The two brawny men motioned Harry in first. He moved to the other side of the table. They stood just inside the one door that they closed behind them.

"Where's the rubber hoses, boys?" Harry asked amiably. He mentally dubbed the pair Tweedle-dee and Tweedle-dum.

The two men's expressions remained the same. "No rubber hoses," said Tweedle-dee just as affably. "Would you mind opening your bag for us, Inspector?"

Harry stared at the men for a moment, then swung his one carry-on case onto the table, unclipped and unzipped it open. He laid it out and stepped back. The two men moved forward and gingerly displaced the shirts, socks, tie, and underwear until they revealed a handgun-cleaning kit.

"Toiletries?" Tweedle-dee innocently inquired. The two men retreated to their previous positions.

"Would you mind taking off your jacket, Inspector?" asked Tweedle-dum.

This was the moment of truth, Harry realized. He would be within his rights not to comply, but he didn't see what good it would do him. The city's officials would only keep after him until they pegged him. Might as well get it over with at the outset, he figured.

Harry didn't take off his coat. He merely pulled one side back to reveal his .44 in its shoulder holster. Now the pair of men let their smiles grow. One tsked. The other clucked.

"Now that isn't exactly kosher, is it, Inspector?" said Tweedle-dum the clucker. "I'm sure you have a right and proper license to carry the weapon, but I don't see how you could have arranged to get the proper permits completed for Chicago possession, given that you just left San Francisco this afternoon."

"You got me, boys," Harry emotionlessly admitted. "So what'll it be? Confiscation, a night at headquarters, or some friendly graft?"

"None of the above," said the short, dark-haired man in the tailored suit who suddenly entered the room from behind the pair. Harry could only see his shoulders from behind the two brawny officials. When

those men moved aside, the third man's back was toward Harry since he was closing the door after him. Finally he turned to face the San Francisco cop. Harry saw the smooth, handsome face of a slim, muscular man in his mid-thirties. A man with straight dark hair, slanted eyes, and slightly yellowish skin. An Oriental man. A Japanese man.

"Sergeant Terry Inagaki," the smaller man said, standing about five feet eleven inches in his loafers. He held his hand across the table, over the open suitcase, toward Harry. Callahan took it, feeling a hard, practiced grip. He saw the man's wrist was thick and muscular. He either used a heavy, powerful gun himself or was seriously training with weights.

"Sorry about the inconvenience, Inspector," Inagaki went on in soothing, apologetic tones, "but we had to know where you stand."

"I'm just visiting," Harry countered. "No good cop goes anywhere without his piece."

Inagaki smiled a patient, but disbelieving smile. "I've read your file, Inspector," he went diplomatically on. "You never let go of an investigation once you get your teeth in it. It is not mere coincidence that you are in Chicago just sixteen hours after the kidnapping of a Japanese girl from your apartment house."

"So what's the bottom line?" Harry asked.

"I think . . ." Inagaki began, then changed his approach. "The department feels that you should choose some other location for your vacation. We are prepared to fly you, at no extra cost, to the city of your choice anywhere within the continental United States"

"Why?" Callahan cunningly asked.

Inagaki answered flatly. "Because we do not want you to be the first innocent victim of the coming Oriental street-gang explosion."

The room was suddenly filled with indirect menace. The looks on the two airport officials' faces told Harry that what Inagaki had said was valid. Even these guys had seen the signs of upcoming trouble. "Do I have a choice?" Callahan slowly inquired.

Inagaki slowly became blandly inscrutable. "You always have a choice, Inspector. This is a free country. It is a democracy which would never consider incarcerating its own citizens out of fear and ignorance." Harry picked up the sardonic irony of the policeman's statement. His own relatives had probably been put in the American internment camps for the Japanese during World War II.

"Then I think I'll stay awhile," Callahan decided. "You want my gun?"

Inagaki stood his placid ground for a second before waving a casual hand at Harry's shoulder holster. "Keep it," he said lightly. "And come with me. If you're going to get back from your vacation alive, we have a lot of groundwork to cover."

Driving from the airport to downtown Chicago was a little like traveling from Kansas to the land of Oz. After staring off into vast stretches of flat, dull farmland, the glittering glass spires of the Windy City—lit up in the Illinois dusk—appeared in the distance like the Emerald City itself. The first hint of its mortality came on the highway when Inagaki's unmarked car stopped in a sea of other vehicles—all crawling home in the errantly named "rush" hour.

"The lines have been drawn," Inagaki was telling Harry as the car creeped along. "Out of the morass of early fighting, two Japanese gangs have risen to power, each with their main concentration in Chicago. Whoever emerges victorious in the coming war will be able to reap profits from women, numbers, drugs, and gambling in New York, Los Angeles, and your own San Francisco."

"How organized is it?" Harry asked.

"As tight as the Chinese groups," Inagaki answered. "The leaders are *yakuza* and ex-yakuza from Japan, who give orders to Japanese businessmen in America who control the young gang members who serve as soldiers."

"What are the two factions?" Harry inquired.

"The more violent, desperate, and disorganized of the two are the 'Seppuku Swords,' which roughly translates into the Suicide Swords. They're losing ground to the *Kozure Ronin,* which means 'Renegade Wolves,' so they'll do anything to weaken them."

"Including kidnapping a Japanese girl from the West Coast?" Harry wondered aloud. Sergeant Inagaki nodded.

"She must have some connection to one of the gangs somehow," the Chicago cop figured.

The two fell silent as Callahan considered his situation. It was now fairly clear that Suni was being held hostage. It was unlikely that she was a member of these gangs, so her past—the past she would not share with Harry—had caught up with her. And in order to free her of it, Harry would have to fight his way right into the heart of the Japanese gang war.

Only when Inagaki turned off the highway for one of the suburban exits did Harry speak again. "This isn't the way to downtown."

"I think it is best if you stay with me and my wife tonight," the

sergeant replied. “It will be safer for you. Besides, we can do much better together than separately. I hope you will agree.”

Begrudgingly, Harry accepted the offer. He didn’t want to waste any time before searching for Suni, but he had to admit that blundering all over the city wouldn’t help matters. Inagaki offered him a few more hours of information and reconnaissance. He looked over at the gleaming towers of apartments, bank buildings, insurance companies, hotels, and tourist attractions which made up the Chicago skyline. Somewhere amid all the glossy metal and glass was Suni. Harry felt sure of it. And he vowed to find her—dead or alive.

Inagaki lived in Arlington Heights, a residential suburb of Greater Chicago, or Chicagoland as it used to be called. His was a small stone house at the end of a wide, winding street. It was set on a little hill and surrounded by trees and a large, sloping, grassy yard. It was an extremely comfortable-looking place and area—giving Harry a feeling of peace. That unusual feeling made the San Francisco inspector wander along the grounds toward the house as Inagaki went up the curving stone walk, pulling out his door keys.

Around the side of the house, Harry could see a well-cultivated garden, its colorful flowers blowing in the lukewarm spring breeze of early evening in Illinois. Harry turned back to the front just as Inagaki slid his key into the front door lock. Harry looked toward the street, his eyes suddenly focusing on one section of a tree midway down the lawn.

Crucified on the tree was a cat. There was a nail through each of its paws, and its stomach had been sliced open. Its dripping guts hung down below its outstretched legs.

Harry stopped in his tracks, staring at the slaughtered house pet. Inagaki, unable to see the thing from the front steps, twisted the key, turned the knob, and then called to Harry as he pushed the door open. If he hadn’t pivoted to the side of the steps when he did so, the subsequent shotgun blast would have torn out his middle.

As it was, the front door blew outward in a hail of highly concentrated steel pellets, hurling Inagaki to the side and causing Harry to duck instinctively. The boom of the shotgun blast rolled across the lawn and echoed against the neighboring trees.

Callahan raced to where the sergeant had fallen in the bushes covering the right side of the house’s foundation. As he passed the front door he could see a sawed-off shotgun moored just inside through a jagged hole in the center of the wood. It was set up in such a way that pushing the door in would depress its trigger.

Harry grabbed the Japanese cop by the shoulder as Inagaki

painfully twisted over. “I’m all right,” he said. Harry immediately left his side and leaped up the steps. “No!” Inagaki warned. “I know these gangs’ methods. I’m one of the detectives assigned to their investigation. Their specialty is traps within traps.”

The Chicago cop struggled to his feet and joined Harry on the porch. Looking through the hole in the door, he pointed to a slack wire that was attached to the shotgun trigger which led deeper into the house.

“You see?” he said. “There’s another surprise waiting.” Inagaki said it with almost glee. He seemed to find the gangs’ cunning fascinating. He called out his wife’s name. “Denise!” There was no answer. Only then did his smooth features bunch up in worry.

Harry had enough of waiting. He moved his hand forward to push the door all the way open and charge in. Inagaki caught his wrist in mid-move. “No,” he repeated. “We must use caution.”

“There’s a time for caution,” Harry growled, remembering the dead cat. “And it’s passed.” He shook off the Oriental’s hand and ran toward the garden. When he rounded the side wall, his worst fears were confirmed. He could see that the back door was still intact. So if the wire running into the house was not attached to another gun to blow out the back door, what was it attached to?

Harry found out when he looked into the ground-floor bedroom window. Inside there was a woman bound stringently to a chair with a sack over her head and what was obviously a bomb balanced precariously on her knees. From what Harry could see, it had a thin glass shell on one side which, if broken, would detonate the explosive as well as a timer attached to a wire.

The timer had been set in motion when the shotgun’s trigger had been pulled. It too would set off the explosive. Harry immediately tried the window. It was locked. He moved back two feet and dived forward. He smashed through the glass and wood, slamming to the bedroom floor. The noise made the bound woman start, jiggling the bomb. It rocked, slipped and then toppled toward the floor.

Harry rolled and caught it. He rolled back and threw it out the window. As Terry Inagaki came charging into the room from the front, the device exploded in the back yard, leveling one wall of the back porch.

CHAPTER

Five

Denise Inagaki cried over her dead cat while Harry and her husband plotted out an initial strategy to counter the terror.

With the hood off and her body untied, the wife turned out to be an attractive half-breed in her late twenties wearing a striped top and jeans. If Harry was any judge of exotic good looks, one of her parents must have been American while the other was Japanese.

Her husband marveled again at the gangs' guile while the local police looked over the damage and took notes.

"Now you see what we are up against, Inspector," the sergeant said. "The explosive was constructed so that it would detonate either with a shock or by timer. If it fell off my wife's knees, it would have exploded at her feet. Or it would have gone off in her face seconds after my supposed death by shotgun. We both owe our lives to you."

"Never mind that." Harry waved the gratitude away. "What's the point of killing a cop and his wife? Why get innocent bystanders involved?"

"It is a warning," Terry explained. "It is not a good sign. And we are not so innocent. The gangs know I am getting close. This means that they want me off their backs bad enough to threaten my loved ones. It means that their own fight is coming to a head. Whatever the final outcome of the Nihonmachi underworld fight, it will happen very soon."

The whole thing stunk worse than a train wreck of spoiling meat. Harry didn't feel comfortable fighting a group willing to balance a bomb on a helpless woman's lap. That torturing was bad enough, but to then slaughter the family cat was the afterthought of practiced sadists. Harry remembered the raped and strangled girl at the wax museum. The sooner he found Suni, he figured, the better he would feel.

"So what can you do about it?" Harry asked the Oriental policeman.

"We," Inagaki corrected him. "What can *we* do about it. You have proven your worth this night. I think I can trust you with a little information." The two walked from the ruined back porch to the peaceful garden on the side of the house. Harry's back was to the wall,

but he could see the Japanese's face illuminated by the living-room lights.

"Our contacts inside the Kozure Ronin organization tell us that the gang will hit the First Union City Bank near the entrance of Wacker Drive tomorrow morning. It seems as if they need more funds to fuel their war. Chicago's finest will be out there in force, but I think it might be advisable to have you on hand as a backup. What do you say?"

Harry checked his watch. It was seven o'clock, Tuesday evening. He had just enough time to check out the bank area, do some planning, and get some missed sleep. "No offence, Terry," he said, "but do you think you can get me into town at a speed faster than five miles an hour now?"

The structure of Chicago was magnificent. Dirty Harry Callahan took a long, hard snootful of the city as he left his hotel room at eight-fifteen Wednesday morning. The ten hours of sleep he had taken was just what he needed to reload his mental and physical weapon. And he hoped the four-speed loaders in his two jacket pockets would be enough to keep his literal weapon filled.

He walked out the Sheraton's entrance to stand at the foot of the Loop's northwest corner. This downtown business center was locked in by the rectangular-shaped tracks of the elevated train and the bodies of water all around. To the east was Lake Michigan. To the north and west was the Chicago River. Harry stood under Wacker Drive and in the geographic center of Marina City, the Merchandise Mart, the Opera House and Orchestra Hall, and the Chicago City Hall.

It was a bustling, shiny area in the middle of the morning's scurry to get to work. It was the worst possible time for a bank robbery. Harry considered the situation as he walked toward the bank, his Magnum heavy, solid, and somehow comforting under his left arm. He looked up at the double-decked Wacker Drive—with the local traffic crawling on the upper section and the express lanes filling up on the lower.

He looked over at the elevated trains, which only crossed the drive in two places, as the roadway moved alongside the river. Then he checked the city streets to and from the bank itself. These were relatively clear, but the sidewalks were full of innocent workers straggling along, trying to get to their offices. Their presence would make it dangerous for the cops to move in or fight back if the robbers started anything.

The First Union City Bank was in the middle of the right-hand section of the block. Harry hung back in the doorway of a shoe store

down and across the street. He scanned the area for any police giveaways, but there was not a cop car or motorcycle in sight. Undercover men could be crawling all over the place, but Harry couldn't pick them out. The sidewalk vendors, window cleaners, and panhandlers all looked authentic. Either the Chicago force had the world's best actors or something was very, very wrong.

Harry didn't have time to double check. The criminal festivities began early. As he started out from his vantage point, two nondescript vehicles turned the corners onto the block from different directions. One was hightailing it down Harry's side of the two-way street, and the other was moving away from the San Francisco cop, on the bank's side. Both cars screeched to a halt in front of the bank, across the street from each other, one pointing north, the other pointing south.

The cop tried peering through the windshield, but it was tinted and the morning sunlight glared off the glass, further obstructing his view. Harry reached into his jacket, expecting a double team of robbers to leap out of the cars any second. However, the moment his fingers touched the .44 butt, the bank doors exploded outward.

It was completely unexpected and completely effective. The metal twisted and the glass spun out, cutting down a swath of pedestrians where they walked. A makeshift path from the entrance to the street was created by stunned, cut, falling innocents. Harry stepped forward, his hand frozen on his gun, his eyes squinting, and his jaw nearly dropping open. His teeth ground against each other as six masked men —dressed the same way as Suni's kidnappers—came leaping out of the smoking hole in the bank's doors.

They had been inside all along, he realized. Somehow they had gotten in from the back, sides, or top, rifled the safe, and then blown their way out front where not one, but two cars waited for them. As the half-dozen robbers split into two groups, Harry looked around wildly for any sign of the police. As near as he could see, he was the only nonrobber standing on the street. The rest of the pedestrians had dropped to the cement like dominoes.

The block was a smoking, glass-strewn mess with a soundtrack of screaming voices, screeching tires, and roaring engines. As Harry hauled out his Magnum and stepped onto the sidewalk, three masked men tumbled into the car nearest the bank, and the other trio ran across the street toward the other car. Harry saw that each man carried a bulging sack in one hand and a shiny new submachine gun in the other.

Callahan brought the .44 up to eye level and blasted the last of the three street-crossers without so much as a "Halt!" The man flew back, the bag soaring in one direction and the machine gun going in

another. The other two kept running and twisting past other cars, but took a second to blast back at the single man.

Harry fell to the ground as the front of the shoe store seemed to be eaten up by billions of supertermites. The glass disintegrated and hunks of wood framing, plastic display cases, and leather shoes were thrown into the air and ripped apart. Little frisbees of concrete were thrown off the sidewalk and into Harry's face as he crouched. Thankfully, no prone pedestrian was hit.

The surviving pair in the second team dived through the second car's open window as the first car squealed off north. Harry rolled away from the shoe-store entrance, his gun out and pointing as the second car jumped away from the curb in a southerly direction. Harry shot at it as it passed. He saw his bullets slam into the side fender, the passenger door, and then into the top of the left rear tire.

The wheel blew right off the rim, the car's rear jumped, and then slammed back onto the street, its trunk slewing sideways across the road. Harry jumped to his feet, Magnum at the ready as two patrol cars came screeching around each of the street's corners—creating a roadblock that sealed the area.

Harry cursed himself. The cops had planned to seal the crooks up after they had made their getaway, so no early-morning worker would get hurt. Harry was just lucky his shooting hadn't inadvertently wounded anyone.

As it was, the second car couldn't brake with its rear tire flattened, so it slammed broadside against the two patrol cars, which had stopped nose to nose. Even so, Callahan quickly learned that the Chicago force's good plan was not good enough. From both the crippled car and the other escape auto came the sound of combined machine-gun firepower. At one end of the street, the flat-tire car annihilated the side windows of the patrol cars blocking it, while at the other end the stalled auto blasted in the two front windshields in *its* path, with a rain of 9mm bullets.

All the windows just blew out as the four cop cars were decorated with black holes. Harry could see the cops who were not quick enough to duck jiggle in their seats as the lead was pumped into their bodies.

The crooks in the crippled car jumped out the opposite windows from the riddled cop vehicles as the other auto squealed into reverse. It rammed a parked car at the curb as Harry ran to the cover of a thick, green street sign. The moving escape car tried to ram the blocking cop vehicles out of the way, as Harry emptied his .44 cylinder at the scrambling masked men pouring out of the crippled car.

He hit one of the masked crooks just as the man's feet touched asphalt. The Magnum's power hurled the robber right back into the rear seat. The driver ducked as he slipped out behind the wheel, Harry's last bullet smashing off a hunk of the dashboard. The driver laid down a cover of 9mm rounds from his Japanese-made SCK Model 65 as the last of three robbers ran behind him.

The street sign absorbed most of the more important slugs as Harry flipped open his cylinder with one hand and jammed another six rounds into place before the upended shells had even hit the ground.

Another pair of police cars came screeching onto the scene as Harry was reloading. They appeared behind the other four patrol vehicles as backups. Their sudden arrival forced the driver of the crippled car to stop firing and hightail it after the other crook. That gave Harry time to pivot toward the running man and cut him down with another blast from the .44.

It hit the crook in the shoulder and sent him skittering into the gutter. The driver behind him, meanwhile, was trying to shoot at the newly arrived cops while heading for the ramming car. He became the target of two cops with shotguns and Harry's .44. The policemen's blasts reached the hapless wheelman first, ripping out entire sections of his torso. Harry's Magnum round rearranged his facial features. The man dropped like a rag doll dipped into a food processor.

Just as the final man in the crippled car fell, the other vehicle managed to nudge aside and squeeze through the two cop cars blocking it. The backup patrol car and the dark getaway sedan traded shots as it sped past, but it didn't stop. It turned the corner just as a seventh patrol car came barreling toward it.

The escape vehicle hardly slowed down. It kept turning until it wasn't merely going around the corner, but was rather leaping up onto the sidewalk. Terrified pedestrians scrambled out of the way as the getaway auto smashed over a garbage bin, knocked down a street lamp and struggled back onto the bank's block, heading in the direction of the crippled car.

As it roared past him, Harry searched for a human target, but could find none. All the crooks in the first car had ducked down, including the driver. They were speeding toward the four stopped cars at the other end of the street. Harry pointed his .44 at the front tire and was just about to shoot when a petrified pedestrian bumped into him in a desperate attempt to leave the crash site.

Harry's aim was thrown off, and he loosened his trigger finger in time not to peg an old lady who had wandered in front of his wavering Magnum barrel. All the innocent bystanders charged toward

the bank, away from the crippled getaway car, as it looked certain that the other getaway vehicle would plow right into the smoking, bullet-ridden automotive roadblock.

But at the last possible moment, the getaway car swerved toward the left-hand sidewalk, leaping up onto the curb again and squealing around the obstruction, its hub caps getting ripped off by the building fronts. It dodged right in front of the backup patrol car, ripping off its headlights and bumper, and then zoomed onto the entrance to the express level of Wacker Drive. The two patrol cars from the other end of the street combined with the auto that was "shaved" to give chase. Harry surveyed the street's damage as the cop-car trio screamed up the Wacker Drive express entrance after their quarry.

Harry ignored the shocked men, crying women, and excited children to focus his eyes on a beautiful new motorcycle parked at the far end of the street. Harry ran for it, his gun going back into his holster. He recognized it fully as he approached. It was the Kawasaki GPz 1100, a bike about which one of the highway patrolmen Harry knew was nearly masturbating in the squad room. "It is the only production bike that can do a ten-second quarter mile!" the guy practically used to foam. Harry figured that that meant the expensive little sucker could go fast.

He saw that it was attached to a railing by a thick metal chain. Hunching over, he put the barrel of his Magnum against one of the links.

"Hey!" came an angry voice behind him. "That's my bike!"

Harry turned, his Magnum pointed out front "And this is my gun," he told the bearded complainer in the leather jacket.

"You want the keys?" the bearded guy immediately asked in a much more polite voice.

Harry took the offered keys, unlocked the chain guard and revved the light, powerful mother up. "You'll find this at the police station in a day or two," Harry yelled to the owner over the engine's roar. "Make them pay for any damages."

Then the San Francisco inspector did a squealing hundred-and-eighty-degree turn and sped off toward the Wacker Drive entrance. He did a wheelie on the ramp, pulling the sleek Kawasaki onto the local level. The highway was just as crowded as he expected it to be, but it was no problem for the cycle. When Harry couldn't speed along the shoulder, he weaved among the backed-up autos, getting a lot of curses and horn honking as he went.

It made no difference to him. He figured that the express level was about as bad at this time of the morning, especially with the abysmal

transit problems the city was having. He could see no way that the getaway car could get very far, particularly with three cop cars in pursuit. He felt certain that the express level would become a shooting gallery in a matter of seconds—with the commuters getting the worst of it.

Harry stopped the bike midway around the southward curve of the Chicago River. He locked the heavy chain guard of the bike together and put it around his neck. Then he grabbed on to the upper-level guard rail and twisted over the side. From below he heard gunfire and shouts. It was just as he had feared. The crooks had left their stationary vehicle and were proceeding on foot, using every innocent passenger along the drive as hostages.

Callahan lowered himself down, wrapping his legs around a wide support beam. He crawled down like a monkey until he could clearly see the lower level. It was completely packed with motionless cars. The only human movement come from the four masked crooks who were weaving northward between the vehicles and the two cops who were trailing them. For the moment, it was an absurd Mexican standoff. The cops couldn't really return any fire without endangering the lives of the captive motorists. All the police wanted to do was keep the crook quartet busy until both ends of the drive could be bottled up by other officers. What these blockers would do when the crooks threatened to murder one driver every hour on the hour until they were released was anybody's guess.

But Callahan wasn't going to allow it to get that far. As long as none of the petrified drivers started pointing at him, he had the element of surprise on his side. He was lowering himself behind the crooks. Otherwise, he was in the same situation as the other law-enforcement officials. His .44 was powerful enough to pump a bullet through an engine block, let alone a human body. Even if he had the crook dead to rights, there were very few directions he could shoot without a nongetaway car being in the vicinity. Even his Smith and Wesson light .44 loads were strong enough to go through a stomach, then a window or door and into an innocent bystander—especially at this close range.

Harry kept lowering himself as the crooks kept backing toward him. As he neared the lower-level guard rail, one of the cops saw him. Thinking he was just a curious nut, the cop shouted at him. A crook on the outside of the right lane, practically below Harry, turned in response.

Callahan acted immediately. He let go of the rail, swinging himself in, and pulled the heavy chain circle off his neck. As he landed he swung the heavy metal links as the crook was bringing his American-made Foote MP970 up to fire. The chain smashed across the crook's

masked face, knocking him away from the outside car to tumble onto the metal walkway at Harry's feet. The inspector then pulled his Magnum out and pointed it at the lying man's nose.

The masked man's eyes blinked inside the ski mask and the Foote sub-machine gun jerked up as Harry pulled the trigger and spread the guy's head across the walk like breaking open an egg. But instead of a yellow yolk and clear liquid spreading out from it, the man's brains served as the center from which a bubbling flow of lavalike crimson shot out and spread.

Harry didn't take the time to examine his handiwork. He was already hunched over and racing between the cars to confront the three other men he had seen, hiding from his vantage point on the beam. He felt like one of those innocuous little "Pac Man" video games in which a moving yellow ball tries to accumulate as many points on a geometric board as possible before four monsters—coming at him from different directions—destroy him. Here, the cars stood for the geometric playing field, and the Japanese terrorists were the monsters. Only this time the yellow ball was armed, dangerous, and after the monsters instead of points.

The three sets of adversaries weaved among the cars, the only witnesses to their progress being the silent, terrified drivers and passengers. Harry swept behind a Ford Escort to spot another masked man crab walking between lanes with his back toward the San Francisco cop. Taking only a second to crouch on one knee, Harry shot him in the middle of his back.

The second crook dove forward and lay still as Harry moved toward where he thought the third man was. His sense of direction was perfect, but this crook was faster than he had hoped. Callahan appeared between cars where he thought the man would be, only to find that he had doubled back when he heard Harry's first booming shot. Instead of being in front, with his back to Harry, he was in back, with his machine gun aimed.

Harry heard the bolt go back. He leaped as the bullets began whipping up the roadway. He felt a slug nick the back of his shoe as he dove up and to the side, sliding across the roof of a Mercury Zephyr. As soon as everyone heard his big body slam on the car's ceiling, it was open season on San Francisco inspectors. Everybody jumped up and fired at the sound.

It was their mistake. Almost all the bullets went wild, but this enabled Harry to see where the cops and the last crook were. He dropped down to the other side of the car, looking through the window to make sure the passengers were all right. He saw a well-dressed woman on the floor beneath the dashboard, her eyes screwed

shut and her hands over her ears. He looked up from her to see the third crook out the opposite window, pulling the trigger on his gun. Harry fell as the driver's and passenger's windows blew out from the force of the point-blank onslaught. He heard the woman scream as he pushed his Magnum under the car and pulled the trigger, ripping the crook's ankle from between his shin and foot.

The crook fell, screaming, blood pumping out of his leg like water from a garden hose. Harry adjusted his aim as the man's crying head dropped to the road, then blew it apart with his third bullet. The crying and screaming stopped, replaced instead with a noxious oozing sound.

Harry was already on his hands and knees, heading toward the spot where he had seen the last crook. He remained low, checking under the cars for the remaining positions. It was a madder scramble now, as the cops realized they outnumbered the final crook. Harry, however, was intent on getting to the man first.

He finally stopped as he saw the crook's feet slowly sliding on the other side of a Cutlass Supreme. Harry planted his feet firmly under him, slipped the Magnum back into its holster, wrapped one hand around the door handle and held the chain loop loosely in his other hand—like a rope lasso.

Waiting until he felt the crook was directly opposite him, on the other side of the Oldsmobile, Callahan straightened his legs and propelled himself over the car's roof. As he flew through the air, he hurled the chain forward, neatly wrapping it around the crook's neck. He landed on the opposite side of the car and twisted. The chain was locked tightly under the crook's chin. The man choked and tried to pull his gun up, but Harry wrenched it out of his grip with his own free hand.

For a second, they were both almost upright, their heads showing over the car roofs. The cops took advantage of the moment, firing their .38 and .357 rounds, not caring which man they hit. Harry dragged the crook down, increasing the pressure on the chain and grabbing the bulging sack out of the strangling man's hand. The inspector sat heavily on the roadway and dumped the bag's contents onto the asphalt. A pile of paper, plain white paper, fell on the broken white line and then was swept up by the wind coming off the river.

"It was all a diversion, wasn't it?" Harry hissed into the crook's ear. "Fucking kamikaze bank robbers, right?" Harry pulled the man's head back. "Well, no noble death for you this time. You're coming with me." Then he hit him with the business end of his Magnum. As the crook slumped, dazed, Harry called out, "It's all over! I got the last one! You can come collect these guys now!"

To show his good faith, Harry stood up with his hands raised. Slowly, cautiously, the two pursuing cops emerged from their hiding places and approached. Soon they were standing in front of him, their guns still drawn and pointed at the tall man's middle.

"Who are you, hot dog?" asked one.

"A plainclothes from another division," Harry answered, lowering his hands.

"Hey, I was told we wouldn't be using undercover guys on the street," the other cop said, his gun drooping.

"I didn't like the smell of it," Harry answered honestly. "I thought I'd come by on my way to work."

"Well, I'm glad you did," said the first, holstering his piece and moving to Harry's right to look at the fallen, groggy crook. "This has been a fucked-up operation from square one. Christ, it'll take headquarters ten minutes to get someone out here."

The other cop followed his partner's example by putting away his weapon and taking up position on Harry's left. "Man," he said. "It was the craziest robbery I've ever seen."

"It's going to get crazier," Harry promised, then punched the right cop in the jaw. The man fell sideways and slammed against the door of a Ford Escort before sliding unconscious to the ground. The left cop tried to jump back, but a Chevy Citation was in his way. He tried to pull out his gun again, but Harry's hands were in his way.

Callahan knocked the weapon from its holster and then shoved the man's jaw back with his palm. He heard the bone snap against the skull just before the left cop's eyes fluttered and he fell back.

By this time, many of the frightened drivers had become curious and stepped outside their cars. All of them knew better than to approach Harry, however. The inspector reached down and tugged the ski mask off of the awakening Japanese. Beneath the cloth was the face of a young man—a teenager if Harry judged right. He grabbed his hair and jerked him to his feet. By the time the kid stood erect, he was wide-awake.

"See, man?" said Harry, seething, one hand still in his hair, the other pointing the Magnum at his nose. "You don't have to give up your life to the cause. All you have to do is take me to your leader for a little talk. Either that or I'll introduce you to your ancestors in a very dishonorable way."

"Ok," the kid said hastily. "Sure. I'll take you. But how are we gonna get out of here?"

Callahan directed the last crook to climb back up the support beam

to the upper level. He checked his watch. It was only a couple of minutes since the robbery. If they were lucky, Harry could avoid the other patrol cars until the kid could direct them to a decent hiding place. Now was the time to see just how fast the Kawasaki could go. It ought to do well. It was made in Japan, for Christ's sake.

Chicago, like every other city, had a lot of holes to crawl into. Once Harry and the Japanese made it off the drive on the motorcycle, they ditched the machine and stayed in the back room of a pizza parlor for most of the day. From their position among racks of cheese, oil, and pepperoni, Harry heard the radio reports about the holdup. According to them, the thieves got away with almost a half-million dollars, utilizing a cunning diversion in the front of the bank to mask another group of thieves getting the cash out the back. At least that was the present police theory.

After nightfall and a large Italian pie with sausage and mushrooms, the Japanese led Harry to a car, and they both went up Lake Shore Drive past the Navy Pier, the Palmolive Building, the Water Tower, and the Oak Street Beach. Stretching out from that point, northward up the coast, was what was known as the "Gold Coast," a section of high-class, high-cost apartment buildings.

The Japanese's car turned into one of these places, and they parked in a reserved spot in the underground garage. Without a word, the Japanese went over to the elevator and pressed the button "PH," for Penthouse. The two men went up almost fifty flights before the doors opened. Standing on the other side of the opening, between four of his guards, was the leader of the Kozure Ronin and the mastermind behind the morning's robbery.

Sergeant Terry Inagaki.

CHAPTER

Six

Harry Callahan was not surprised. Angry, yes; surprised, no. Terry Inagaki stood before him, secure in the very heart of the Kozure Ronin, smiling like an understanding yet vindictive diety just about to eradicate a naughty worshiper.

"Come right in, Inspector," the traitorous Chicago cop stated. "I have been expecting you."

Harry remained in the elevator, one finger on the "Door Open" button, and his other hand wrapped around the surviving crook's neck. "What makes you so sure I won't just kill you and leave?" he asked quietly.

The inspector's question caught Inagaki halfway in a turn. Patiently, but with a touch of irritation, the Japanese stood in profile and looked at Harry.

"Because I know you too well, Inspector," Inagaki explained. "First, you are a pragmatist. You do not fight unless you know you can win—and you're sure you cannot win. So you know there is no way you could shoot me and get out of this building alive—even with Ryoma as a shield." Inagaki motioned toward the surviving crook.

"Second, you are a realist. You know that if you kill me you will be back at base one concerning the kidnapping of Suni Michelle. And she is, after all, the only reason you are concerning yourself in all this. True?"

Harry did not answer. He merely released Ryoma and pushed him forward. Inagaki smiled as if he had won something precious, then turned away. The four guards fell into position all around Harry—one in front, in back, and on both sides. Inagaki led the way to a pair of plain metal doors opposite the elevator. He pushed them open to reveal a spacious room with redwood panels evenly distributed along the walls and interspersed with banners depicting ancient Japanese insignia and family crests.

The floor was highly polished varnished hardwood on which several bamboo mats were evenly spaced. Across the way was a platform, upon which a ceremonial sword holder made out of animal horns was set. A long sword was resting several inches above a short sword. Both

were curved and had ornate metalwork on their long, cloth-covered hilts. Callahan recognized them as samurai swords.

Inagaki moved unerringly toward the platform and stepped up. He was wearing a double-breasted pinstripe suit with fairly baggy pants. Only when he was standing on the upraised section did Harry see he was wearing split-toe sandals rather than shoes. The Japanese pulled up his pants legs and sat on his knees. He motioned the guards surrounding Harry to walk to the left of the platform. The four men moved, and Harry had little choice but to go along.

Inagaki motioned Ryoma to his feet. The crook hurried forward, fell to his knees before the platform, and kissed the floor in supplication.

"Please excuse me, Inspector," Inagaki said humbly but with iron in his voice. "Before we can speak further, there is a pressing matter which must be seen to." He clapped his hands. Behind the platform and to the right, one of the redwood panels slid open. Out came Denise Inagaki, carrying a short samurai sword upon a pillow. She ceremoniously walked to Ryoma's side and stopped.

"Ryoma Seami," Inagaki intoned. "You have failed in your mission, so causing shame to fall upon the house of the Kozure Ronin. You were to divert official attention from the establishment and leave no clues as to your real purpose. Instead, you have fled the scene, hoping to gain favor by bringing a man you feel may be a threat to the house."

Throughout the entire diatribe, Ryoma did not move from his bowed position.

"In reality, this man is no threat. By attempting to gain favor, you have forgotten your original purpose and invited disaster. There is only one honorable solution to your dilemma."

Ryoma sat up. His face was intent, but composed. Denise Inagaki lowered herself to her knees and placed the sword by the young man's side. She bowed to him, stood, and left the room. Ryoma waited until she had disappeared and then took the short, curved sword in his hand. Between the sword and the pillow was a thick cloth. Ryoma wrapped the cloth near the top of the sleek, shiny blade. He held the sword so that the tip was pointed at his stomach.

Harry didn't need to have the situation explained. He knew the rite of hari-kiri when he saw it. He felt the weight of his Magnum still in his shoulder holster, but he knew there was little he could do with it. Inagaki was right. The little bastard had too many answers to be killed yet. In the interim, however, he had to be witness to the young man's execution.

"I have pledged my life to you," Ryoma told Inagaki. "I am ready to

end it on your word."

Inagaki stood, pleased. He lifted his own long sword from its holder and pulled the wicked blade from its black scabbard. "Yours will be an honorable death," he said. "A warrior's death. You will go to a land much better than this."

Harry could see, when push came to shove, the kid took a little more convincing. He started to sweat when Inagaki stepped down from the platform, and his mouth began to work once the Chicago cop took up position right behind him. Soon he could not keep his body from shaking. Harry checked out the faces of his guards. The ones beside him were licking or chewing on their lips. One was blinking fairly rapidly. The other was breathing hard. Harry turned his head to look full in the face of the guard there. The guard's eyes jumped from the quivering Ryoma to Harry's cool gaze.

Harry gave him a big, knowing smile, as if to say "There, but for the grace of Inagaki, go you."

He turned forward in time to hear Ryoma scream and see him plunge the short blade into his abdomen. Inagaki was tensed, his long blade up over the kid's head. Blood waterfalls began to stream down Ryoma's pelvis. The young man, grunted, gasped, cried, and yelled once more as he tried to push the imbedded blade across to his side.

Suddenly, Inagaki swung down with his long sword and neatly, cleanly cut off Ryoma's head. Even Harry was shaken as the head rolled and bounced off the bottom of the platform, but he kept his shock from showing. No matter what anyone thought, the live, unrehearsed decapitation of a person was not a sight that could be accepted calmly. The inspector's guards were visibly upset as the headless neck stump shot out a stream of blood seven feet into the air.

Inagaki turned toward Harry as the corpse fell forward with a thunk, his eyes gleaming in the big room.

"This is what the Kozure Ronin are all about, Inspector," he breathed. "This is how dedicated we are to our cause. You have seen what we are willing to do."

Harry stared implacably into the fanatical eyes of the Japanese man, then slowly raised his hands to applaud. Three times. Sharply. The sound reverberated slightly against the wood paneling.

"Now that the floor show is over," he said, "can we get down to brass tacks?"

Inagaki stared back at the inspector for a few moments to gauge the depth of his sincerity and then abruptly swung the sword toward the floor. The movement cleaned the blade of blood. The tiny red drops slapped into the wood at Harry's feet. The guard to his right started as

it did so. Callahan couldn't help but wonder how many other hari-kiri victims had to be chased around the room by Inagaki and his sword before going on to "the better land."

"You are a hard man," Inagaki told him, turning toward the platform.

"Not as hard as you," Harry responded. "To go through all you have in the last twenty-four hours."

Inagaki returned to his sitting position on the platform, his face as angelic as a choirboy's, even though the headless corpse still bowed before him, and Ryoma's unseeing eyes stared up at the ceiling below him. "What have I gone through?" Inagaki asked.

"The routine at the airport first," Harry explained. "No police force offers money to get someone out of town. Any other officer would have told me to beat it and let me pay the freight. You had the capital to offer an expense-paid holiday."

Inagaki pursed his lips, closed his eyes, and nodded. It was a signal to continue.

"And the routine at the house. Shotguns, bombs, all very flashy and all making about as much sense as the Rockettes in El Salvador. The final straw was the crucified cat. That was a warning. But why give a man a warning and then try to kill him? The warning was from the Seppuku Swords, but the bomb show was set up to divert suspicion. No one would believe you were a gang leader after they tried to kill you."

Inagaki smiled and nodded. "All very true. The bomb could only be set off by a radio signal I controlled. I saw that you had thrown it from out in the hall, pressed the button, and ran in just in time for the big boom. But is that all that made you suspect me?"

"Suspect, yes," Harry answered. "I didn't know until the robbery. The damn thing looked like a scene from *Car 54, Where Are You?* There was no way someone could have gotten out the back with all the shooting going on in front. All the reports said that half a million was taken, but all the Ronin's bags were stuffed with paper. The only person who could have gotten out of that area from all the cops was another cop. So I knew one of the gang leaders was you. I just had to find your headquarters."

"And here you are," Inagaki concluded. "It is my turn to applaud you, Inspector." He did so. Three times. Sharply. Then his face became hard and deadly. "What do you expect to gain out of this?"

"Don't play inscrutable," Harry countered coldly. "If you wanted me dead, the shotgun, bomb, or robbers could have done it. You only had me at the robbery as a test. If I didn't survive, I wasn't worthy. If I did,

we could move on to the next step."

"Which is?"

"Answers, you miserable little fucker," Harry replied calmly. "You wanted me here; all right, I'm here. So where's Suni?"

A pause hung in the room like a strangled man. Inagaki's eyes became dull black orbs. Finally, the little Oriental rose to his feet. "Inspector, give your gun to one of the guards. It will be returned to you after this meeting. You will need it."

Harry pulled the weapon out and handed it to the man behind him."

"Leave us," Inagaki instructed the guards. They did so. Callahan was alone in the cavernous room with the Kozure Ronin head. He stood exactly where the guards had left him, waiting for the Japanese to speak.

"The Seppuku Swords have Suni," he finally revealed. Michelle is not her last name nor is Terry my first. I am Tetsuya Inagaki. She is Suni Inagaki. My sister."

The revelation had all the effect of a cool wind on Callahan. When the inspector did not speak, Tetsuya continued.

"Her captivity is the only reason we had to rob the bank. If they did not have her, we could have raided one of their dens. As it is, they threaten to kill her if I do not relinquish my post and allow the Seppuku Swords to control the Nihonmachi underworld. Do you have any idea how much power and money I would be giving up?"

Harry had some idea. Enough money to set his army up with the most modern of sub-machine guns. Enough to send the teenage hatchet men all over the country to fight with the Chinese. Enough money to buy the loyalty of soldiers so they'd be willing to go on suicide missions and commit hari-kiri on demand. The Seppuku Swords were not asking Inagaki to leave his post; they were banishing him from his lifestyle, his corrupt being, his entire way of life.

"The disembowled feline was a warning, yes," Inagaki continued. "It is what they intend to do to Suni. I have until our summit meeting on Friday to decide. Then the two factions will meet to decide whether it will be war or peace." The Japanese looked directly into Harry's eyes. "You have less than forty-eight hours to find and free my sister." Inagaki looked down and shrugged. "It is a reward for surviving the robbery."

Harry smiled. "You cannot do the work of one Anglo round-eye?" he asked, letting derision creep into his voice.

Inagaki became philosophical. "The sight of a Japanese face would scare leads away. An American face will only create curiosity and

perhaps derision. And if the Ronin make any move against the Swords, it will mean immediate torture and death for my sister. The others will not be expecting one lone white man."

The Japanese rose, signaling that the meeting was at an end. He stepped down off the platform and went to the wooden panel his wife had disappeared behind. When he pulled it open this time, at least twenty gang members were standing in her place. They looked at Harry like a pack of lions at a Christian.

"Find my sister," said Inagaki softly, "and I'll let you leave Chicago alive."

The gang boss closed the panel behind him. Harry was left alone with the still dribbling corpse of Ryoma.

Callahan got his gun from a guard on the way out. The four men accompanied him down in the elevator and out into the street. Even then, Inagaki had not finished with him. The gang members had some final words.

"Don't bother calling the cops on this place," one said.

"By the time they arrive there will be no evidence of our existence," said another.

All four left to go back into the building. Harry had to hand it to them. For pure, vicious, amoral style, Tetsuya Inagaki and his boys took the teriyaki. But they had given him what he wanted. Information, a deadline, and room to breathe. Suni had to be alive or her brother wouldn't be walking on eggshells. Now all Harry had to do was find her among 224 square metropolitan miles of Chicago.

His search was enormously aided by the package waiting for him back at the Sheraton. It was a small, soft package wrapped in bag paper. It was about the size of a football and Harry could feel right through it. Unless they were making bombs out of cotton now, it had to be something other than a booby trap. Harry brought it up to his room, lay it on the bed, picked up the phone, and asked room service for a steak and a baked potato with a side of beer.

He opened the package. Inside were the dark red leg warmers Suni had been wearing the night of the kidnapping. Inside one of them was a note.

"The girl is in terrible danger. You can help her if you come to the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute tomorrow at three P.M. Meet me in the Near Eastern Antiquities Collection. I will know you."

Harry held on to the note and the warmers for many minutes. He stared at the note and thought. He looked out his hotel window over

the Chicago River. When room service finally showed up forty-five minutes later, he told them to leave the food outside the door. He sat and thought for at least fifteen minutes more. He painfully pieced together the whole insidious plot. The first time he thought he had some sort of solution to the intrigue, his theory fell apart like a house of cards. The second chain of events he hypothesized also didn't hold water. It slipped through his fingers.

Finally he pieced together a series of incidents that made some sort of outlandish sense. It wasn't much of an explanation for the twists and turns in this case, but it was the only one Harry had. He filed his explanation for all the events in the back of his mind as he retrieved his dinner from the hall and dug in. Afterward he took a shower and went to bed. As he drifted off to a solid, solemn, dreamless sleep, he remembered the words his old partner Chico Gonzales—the one who went on to be a teacher—once quoted him.

Chico had been badly wounded by the "Scorpio" sniper, and after his recuperation, quit the force. Chico had told him, years ago, why he thought Harry was alive and successful when so many of his partners and friends were dead. He had used the words of, of all things, a Japanese scholar of the martial arts.

Victory is for the one,
Even before the combat,
Who has no thought of himself . . .

Harry Callahan went to sleep thinking of Suni.

The next morning, Thursday, Harry spent three hours getting to the University of Chicago campus. Not because it was so difficult to find or because the roads were so crowded. Harry left the Sheraton at ten in a taxi, so he missed the morning rush to work, but he took special care in changing taxis every couple of miles to avoid being followed. Otherwise the trip was rather straightforward.

He took Lake Street to the John F. Kennedy Expressway, kept going along the Dan Ryan Expressway until he reached Route 90, and then doubled back along Lake Shore Drive until the campus appeared on his left. The place was a wild combination of soothing ultramodern architecture and awe-inspiring Gothic designs. The Rockefeller Memorial Chapel, which served as the university's centerpiece was a mixture of the two, its bell tower rising more than two hundred feet above the ground.

Harry walked into the campus proper across Hutchinson Court to the left of the Chapel. The wind coming off of Lake Michigan gave a

snap to the sunny day, but it didn't stop the students with early afternoon classes from wearing tank tops, cutoff jeans, T-shirts, and every other manner of casual clothing. But unlike the students Harry had seen at Berkeley and other California campuses, there was hardly a sign of fadism at the University of Chicago.

He saw no "punk" clothing, no "Mohican" haircuts, no seethingly indifferent students buzzing to class on roller skates or a motorized skateboard. Here, very few of the students seemed to be silently screaming "look at me!" It was a refreshing change from the starry-eyed West Coast students.

The inspector walked down the steps and past the fountain in Hutchinson Court. From there he spent about an hour checking out the rest of the area. He circled the Law School with its glass-walled library. He went by the Enrico Fermi Institute for Nuclear Studies. He went by Stagg Field, where the first man-made nuclear chain reaction occurred in 1942. He hoped the day's fireworks would be a little less impressive.

He checked out the Weather Forecast Research Center, the Food Research Institute, the Argonne Cancer Research Hospital, and the Institute for Computer Research. He was impressed by the length and breadth of the university. Its educational facilities seemed inexhaustible on the surface. Finally he wound his way around to the Oriental Institute. He checked his watch before going in. It was 2:07. He had about fifty-three minutes before the rendezvous to check out the interior geography.

It was a squat, rectangular building that was light and airy on the inside. He entered through one of three double doors. Before him was an open-topped marble box in which three guards sat. On either side of the box, which had a desklike fixture on its inside rim, were gatelike entrances which people had to push by. These kept them from walking in and out indiscriminately while counting the entrants as well.

Beyond that was a little open foyer dotted with circles of low, plush seats, where students could sit, read, or stare out the tall, rectangular windows on the walls. Beyond that and to the right were exhibits enclosed in glass-and-wood cases. Surrounding these were book racks, filled with literature on Asian culture.

Harry's attention was on none of it. As he entered, essentially ignored by the men in the box, he inwardly groaned at the number of Oriental faces he saw wandering around the floor. Staring into the exhibit cases, browsing through the book racks, sleeping on the chairs, tending to the files, working behind the other desks; there were all Oriental faces. It was as if the entire Oriental population of the school

and surrounding communities had turned up today at this time.

Harry wandered deeper into the building, looking up in aggravation. Around the open first floor was a simple balcony, lined with files and inset display cases. Digging through the former and looking at the latter were more Orientals. Harry could vaguely categorize them. As far as he could see, there were all types of Far Eastern artifacts and all types of Far Easterners looking at them. He thought he recognized Chinese, Japanese, Koreans, Philippines, and even a Vietnamese here and there.

Just to be on the safe side, he found an elevator and went up to the balcony. From that vantage point he could see the general comings and goings of everyone. He moved patiently along the outcropping for forty-five minutes, trying to see which person would be his most likely contact. He followed the progress of anyone looking even vaguely Japanese.

At three o'clock on the dot, a busload of Oriental children poured into the foyer like maple syrup from a knocked-over bottle. Four harried, young, Anglo teachers, along with two Oriental helpers, did their best to contain the tour group. Harry smiled down at the scene, forgetting, for a moment, why he was there. It was at that moment that the Seppuku Swords attacked.

Callahan felt the movement before he saw it. Over his many years as a policeman, he had developed a kind of sixth sense—which was simply an acute awareness of displaced air. Sometimes it felt as if he had the cross hairs of a sniper scope on the back of his neck. Sometimes it came to him as a sudden chill. This time it was simply a feeling of movement coming from behind. It was a combination of the slight sound of cloth violently rubbing against skin as well as the sudden, unusual vibrations coming from the carpet below his shoes.

However the feeling was explained, Harry reacted instinctively. His sudden movement saved his life. If there were no one attacking he would have looked foolish, whirling around. But as it was, the incredibly sharp knife blade ripped open the side of his jacket, tore through his shirt, and left a thin, superficial scratch on the skin above one rib. His attacker, an older gentleman, wearing glasses and in a suit, swept by as Harry grabbed onto the banister for balance.

The two adversaries faced each other for a second, Harry with his back to the banister, the bespectacled Oriental man with his back to the elevator. The attacker was holding a small stiletto, hardly more than a seven-inch, slightly triangular blade which, if plunged to the hilt, would leave an unhealable hole. Harry kept his hands gripping the guard rail. He knew he didn't have the time to get to his gun before the man attacked again. And he would need both hands to

prevent the knife from plunging deep into his neck, chest, stomach, or sides, As yet, no one else on the balcony or below was aware of what was happening.

Callahan moved slowly to one side. The attacker matched his move, the blade waving slowly back and forth in front of Harry's face. The attacker was sweating, his glasses already sliding down on his small nose. But the eyes behind the lenses showed the intensity of a person completely committed to what he was doing. Harry felt the warm dribble of his own blood across his sliced side.

He moved slightly in the other direction. The attacker moved with him, coming slightly closer. Harry crouched slightly, bringing his hands forward. The two men looked like they were about to wrestle. Then the elevator behind the attacker opened.

Harry saw it coming, a silent "Down" light illuminating the wall. The attacker was taken by surprise and unnerved. He lost his concentration, his expression grew desperate and confused, and he whirled about. Harry mentally debated with himself for a second. He wanted to know about Suni, but this man was a dedicated, purposeful killer who looked about to become unhinged in a library full of students and children. Harry didn't know what the man would do to whomever was in the elevator.

A punch would be inaccurate and not completely effective. After a split second, Harry pulled out the Magnum and shot the assassin in the back from close range. To hell with fair play, he found himself thinking, the bastard cut me.

The attacker flew forward as if hit with a battering ram. He dove in between the two young people in the elevator to smash facefirst into the elevator wall. He then dropped to the elevator floor in a pool of gut-sprinkled blood. The two people inside swept by him and charged Harry.

Callahan was about to inform them that it was self-defense and they had nothing to fear, when he realized that *he* still had something to fear. Both people in the elevator had knives as well.

Before he could react, the one on the left sliced at his empty hand and the one on his right jumped on his gun hand. He felt a prick on his wrist and pulled it away, having to drop the .44 to break the second attacker's grip. As he swung the empty gun hand through the air, he saw a small hole leaking red fluid on the side of his wrist. Then he brought the fist down into the neck of the first attacker, just below the ear.

The young, well-dressed Oriental man stumbled away to the side, the blade he was trying to bury in Harry's upper arm stabbing the air.

Harry lashed out with his foot just as he became aware of the second man reaching for his gun. His peripheral vision told him that his side kick had connected with the reacher's head, pushing it right through the plexiglass banister partition.

He spun back in the other direction just as the first attacker charged again, his knife held high. Harry's mind simply went back to the Police Academy and "Self-Defense 101." The first judo flip the rookies had learned was meant to deal with a knife wielder coming from on high. Harry pivoted, one hand wrapping around the attacker's knife wrist, the other planted solidly just above the elbow. Harry turned and pulled. After all these years, it still worked like a charm. The attacker fell on his back, slid, and somersaulted right over the guard rail. He fell, shouting, and his ass slammed heavily onto the top of a display case. His speed and weight slowly toppled the case over.

That case crashed into another case. And that case fell sideways across a long information desk. The attacker rolled across both case tops and spun behind the desk, smashing into a chair and slamming into the side of a heavy metal desk.

There was absolutely no containing the visiting children now. The teachers were screaming at them to get down and calm down, but they were happily racing all over the library stacks in some elaborate game of hide and seek, thinking the whole thing was some kind of show played out for their benefit. Harry retrieved his gun from under the motionless hand of the kicked man, then watched in amazement as the Japanese girl behind the information desk reached over to grab the hair of a passing little girl and push a blade against her throat.

Holding onto the screaming, kicking girl tightly, the Oriental woman looked calmly and purposefully up at Harry. "Come down, Inspector," she called. "Even aim at me and I'll slit this girl's throat. Drop your gun and come on down."

Callahan considered trying a shot. It had worked before on the "Scorpio" case. That killer had a P-38 against a boy's head. Harry had been about twenty feet away on a straight, slightly higher incline. He had lowered his .44, then swept it up, shooting the madman in the shoulder. But that had been an hysterical, desperate-nut case. This girl was calmly hunching behind a desk, a squealing, squirming child held in front of her. The angle was bad. It just wasn't possible. Harry dropped the gun.

The Magnum fell to the balcony carpet with a soft thud.

"Kick it down," the girl instructed.

Harry swept the .44 off the balcony with his foot. The gun spun out from under the broken plexiglass, dropped quickly through the air,

and bounced twice on the Oriental Institute's ground floor.

"Now you follow, if you please," the girl demanded. Callahan pressed both hands down on the top of the guard rail, as if to vault over. "In the elevator," the woman quickly added, holding her knife even tighter against the throat of the little girl.

Reluctantly, Harry followed orders. He had to press the "Down" button and wait for the blood-coated box to come up from the ground floor. The door opened to reveal his first attacker's corpse still lying within. Harry stepped in, unmindful of all the blood. The door closed behind him and the elevator slowly descended.

The door remained closed on the ground floor for seconds longer than usual. The woman got impatient, screaming for Harry to appear and inadvertently cutting the little girl's skin. The confused child screamed in pain and literally ripped herself out of the woman's grip. She tumbled forward and then ran into the arms of one of the teachers.

At that moment the elevator doors opened and Harry appeared. A hush had fallen over the room. All the excited children had suddenly become quiet and frightened. They huddled in their hiding places, like the school kids rolled into balls in the halls during the atomic-war rehearsals of the sixties. Those adults who still remained in the hall were pressed back in their seats or against the walls.

Harry took the moment to step out of the elevator. Keeping his eyes directly on the woman behind the information desk, he deliberately took off his blood-soaked shoes. He stood in the midst of a bad dream that suddenly turned into a nightmare. As the woman with the blade came around the desk, she was unexpectedly joined by many other people in the room. One student across the way rose from his chair and pulled a knife out of his knapsack. One of the guards in the box at the door vaulted the side, a knife, which he had used to cut the phone wires, in his hand. From the book racks came another student, arm raised, blade flashing. Finally, even one of the "teachers" got up and pulled a knife from a scabbard under his pants leg.

There were five Seppuku Sword members, either disguised or actually working within the Oriental Institute. They were placed in such a way that they controlled the room. One at the door, one in the foyer, one in the racks, one behind the desk, and one at large. But now they were all moving inexorably toward Callahan, holding what he recognized as a "knuckle dagger."

It was one step down from the samurai sword. Made famous during World War I, it was essentially a knife with a brass-knuckle grip. Only these had some slight variations. First, the clean, shiny blades were

leaf-shaped and double-edged. The scabbard was made of sheet steel. The rounded finger holes ended with little triangular stubs, which would dig into the skin and rip muscles if a punch connected. Finally, on the bottom of the hilt was another, longer stub—a butt spike. If the weapon were used like a club, this half-inch metal tooth would puncture the skin like a cleat.

It was a three-sided weapon, used to punch, stab, and bludgeon. All five gang members held them professionally and moved in on Harry slowly. He moved to his right, toward the kid who was coming from the book racks. The kid feinted with his blade, then pulled back when Harry failed to react. The teacher and the guard moved in to block the inspector's way back to the elevator. Harry kept his hands out and his feet wide.

As the group got closer to the racks, the teacher and the guard suddenly charged, screaming. Harry's foot went out, catching the guard in the stomach while his fist went back, catching the kid in the nose. The guard's knife swept down and the kid's knife swept up. Both blades missed Harry's limbs.

As Harry pulled back, the teacher was almost upon him. He wrenched his torso to the side to avoid the knife thrust and dug his thumbs into his attacker's eyes. It was a quick, angry thrust. The teacher's blow just missed Harry's body, the knife's hilt sliding along his side. He stuck his forefingers in the teachers' ears, then pushed his thumbs into each of his eyes. He pushed in, like an opener into a can top.

Instead of soda fizzing out, Harry felt the gelatinous mass try to squeeze past his thumbs, only to end up against the rear of the eye cavity and burst. The jellylike "vitreous humor" splattered out of the gouged socket, splashing Harry's shirt front. He felt his thumbs sink all the way in, completely immersed in gunky blood. The teacher screamed as Harry abruptly pushed him back. The cop's hands left the ruined face and clamped down on the teacher's knife wrist.

Unimpeded by the destruction of the teacher's eyes, the information woman jumped into the melee, slicing down at Harry's already wounded wrist to prevent him from getting the teacher's blade. Callahan released the wrist and moved back as the woman's knife dug into the teacher's skin. Blinded, the latter didn't know what was happening and screamed in pain and fear—much like the little girl whom the woman had previously used as a shield.

The teacher's knife fell to the floor, useless to Harry. The woman pushed the battered teacher aside and came at Callahan. Harry quickly reached over and grabbed the groggy kid. He pulled the boy's body in front of him just as the woman thrust. Her blade sunk into the

kid's chest. Before she could respond, Harry pushed him forward, his wounded body smashing into the woman and throwing them both to the floor.

From there, Callahan immediately ran into the rows of book stacks. The guard and student followed him. As he reached the end of one row, he used the "Red Sea" approach. His pursuers had been too angered and shocked at Harry's thumb-and-blocking defense to think, so when he reached the end of the line, he simply turned around, grabbed the side of the racks to the left and the right, and pulled in.

Like Samson pulling down the Philistine temple's columns, Harry heaved and the heavy wooden bookcases came slamming down on top of his two pursuers. The rack tops met in the middle, momentarily creating a makeshift pyramid, then the heavy books fell off the shelves onto the attackers' heads as the bookcase bases slid away from each other. The whole structure slammed down on the two Seppuku Sword members.

Harry jumped onto the pile, making a point of walking heavily across the prone bodies. But as he quickly moved back out into the open, he could see no sign of the knuckle knives buried under the books. He came out to meet the last attacker—the woman from the information desk. Normally, the match-up would have been ludicrous. Harry was a foot taller than she was and probably a hundred pounds heavier. But he was tired, with a wound in his side and on his wrist. And the woman had a sharp, nasty weapon.

Harry moved back toward the foyer, his arms loose, his eyes blinking. Suddenly he realized that he was a lot more tired than he should have been. His efforts had been fast and vicious, but they should not have left him as winded as he was. He shook his head, but failed to clear the cobwebs there. He reached down toward his torn shirt, and his fingers came away dabbed with crimson. Since his loss of blood couldn't have been that extreme, Harry told himself, his grogginess had to be caused by something else.

He suddenly remembered looking at the dead man's knife in the elevator. Up close, he had seen that the edges were discolored, as if already smeared with blood. Initially, he had assumed it was a combination of his and the attacker's. Now he realized that it was some kind of poison.

His rushing adrenaline had fought the drug in his system for a few minutes, but now it was finally taking effect. His vision clouded. Through misty, unfocused eyes he could see the woman grinning. She was standing in an offense position twenty feet in front of him, her feet wide, her arms out, and the knife in her right fist. She could see him losing control. She was simply waiting for him to drop his guard

completely so she could move in for the kill.

Desperately, he scanned the floor for his Magnum. It was nowhere in sight. He looked for someone to help him. All the children were scattered around the floor, watching in horror. He hoped the campus security forces would arrive in time, but he didn't count on it.

"The girl," he heard himself say to the knife woman in a hoarse whisper. "Suni. Where is she?"

The knife woman smiled even wider. "You'll never know," she swore.

Harry charged her. But his body would not respond properly. His legs wouldn't go where he told them to, and they buckled at the knees with his first awkward steps. Nearly blind now and desperate, his arms flailed out for protection. He swerved to the side and slammed against the information desk counter.

His hands grabbed the lip to keep him upright. It was important to him not to die on his knees or on his face. All thoughts of possible defense were gone. He couldn't think straight. He didn't even look as the woman slowly, triumphantly, approached him, her knife raised.

Harry held on for dear life, blinking, and as he blinked, his fading vision began to clear somewhat. He saw a fleshy form on the other side of the desk. He saw that figure moving in a jerky, intense fashion.

He stopped blinking and tried to focus his eyes. Dimly he saw the outline of a little girl take shape. It was the same little girl the information woman had used as a shield. The child who couldn't have been more than nine or ten years old, had a look of purpose on the angry little face above her neck, which was still dripping a little blood. Below her neck were her thrusting hands. She was beneath the desk lip, out of the attacking woman's vision, pushing something big and unwieldy at Harry. It was his .44 Magnum.

The Seppuku Sword woman stopped just behind Harry's bent back. Her hand was high above her head, holding the knife in an almost ceremonial, sacrificial fashion. She looked at Harry's helpless form with a savage satisfaction, then opened her mouth to scream and plunge the knife downward.

She managed to get out the scream, but the knife stayed where it was. At the last second, Callahan whirled around, the huge revolver held close to his chest, the barrel pointing right between the woman's eyes.

Her yell of triumph switched to one of surprise and horror. It masked the sound of Harry pulling the trigger back once. The last thing the woman saw was the barrel of the .44 growing huge, like a broiling black sun spreading out to engulf the entire sky.

Only Harry saw the flash in the middle of her head and her face suddenly turn into a mockery of symmetry. It looked like a realistic portrait suddenly hit with a can of red and gray paint. The colors splashed out from the head, ripping off hunks of flesh and bone as they spread. Finally there seemed to be a hole in the portrait, which had suddenly seemed to jump far, far away to leave a smoking, dripping gap, as if the canvas had been doused with corrosive acid.

Harry felt pools of liquid and drops of tissue on his own face. He imagined it looked like a piece of modern art and found that very, very funny. He fell to the floor, laughing. He laughed until he couldn't do anything anymore.

CHAPTER

Seven

God winked at Harry Callahan. This was done by disrupting his unconsciousness with clear glimpses of what was happening to him. At first he heard crying and felt himself being lifted. He heard a clear voice say, “Take his gun, take his gun.”

His head fell to the side, and he thought he opened his eyes immediately, but he saw he was in an ambulance along with the little girl who had saved him. She was sitting next to his stretcher while faceless men—their backs to Harry—tended to her cut neck. There were tears on her cheeks, but she smiled bravely at him.

He tried to smile back, but his facial muscles were having none of it. The darkness descended again, accompanied by more crying, coughing, sneezing, grunting, and the general hubbub of activity. The one clear voice he heard this time said, “You can’t bring him in here. We don’t have the facilities. Its too crowded already.”

He felt himself being lifted again. This time when he opened his eyes, the little girl was gone, and he could see Lake Michigan sweeping past the window. He felt a hand on his wrist. “His signals are strong,” said a voice. “Who do you know who might be able to treat this kind of thing?”

Callahan was strangely upset at the answer. All the other voice said in reply was, “I know just where we’ll be able to bring him,” but the enunciation of the sentence’s “Ts” and “r’s” were slurred.

Callahan didn’t know why that upset his sleep as much as it did until he felt himself being unloaded again. This time his head was looking up when his eyes opened. Three concerned faces looked down at him, each face attached to a body which poked and probed at him as they pushed him down the medicinal-smelling white hall. Each face was Oriental.

Harry tried to speak, but no words emerged. His lips wouldn’t even part. He saw the ceiling change from a white one with fluorescent lights to a dull gray one with a trapdoor. He had been pushed into an elevator. The three men stood near his head and shoulders as he felt himself going down. Figuring that there was nothing he could do, Harry closed his eyes and let whatever was going to happen, happen.

In his mind's eye, he saw Suni clearly. Her face was peaceful, but covered in sweat. Her lips were slightly parted, but her eyes were closed. Her nostrils flared occasionally, and the thin strands of dark hair across her face rippled with each exhalation. Harry didn't know how long he was looking at her before he realized his eyes were open and the vision was real.

With abrupt, painful clarity, the world returned. His head jerked up, causing a throbbing pain to course up his neck and engulf his brain. He lowered his head again, his teeth clenched.

"That's right," said a calming voice. "Take it easy. The full effect of the drug will not wear off for many minutes yet."

Harry turned away from Suni's face toward the sound of the voice. He saw a large, unlit lamp above him, then his vision drifted down to settle on the face of a gray-haired man with a mustache. He looked like a vice-principal at a Japanese high school. He was wearing a shirt and tie, but with a white lab coat over them.

Harry licked his lips. "Who are you?" he croaked.

The man shrugged. "No harm in you knowing, I suppose," he mused. "I am Dr. Izo Gosha."

Harry closed his eyes and smiled painfully, trying mentally to push the drug's residue from his muscles. "The head of the Seppuku Swords, I presume," Harry grunted.

"Merely their American representative," the man said humbly, putting a hand on Harry's shoulder. "Please. Do not resist. The effects will diminish of their own accord."

Harry relaxed, feeling a sheen of sweat across his face. "What did you inject me with?" he slowly inquired.

"No injection," said Gosha. "The blades were covered with a paralytic agent. One nick and you should have become dazed and then unconscious, giving much the same impression as a fainting spell. You were much stronger than we supposed, however."

Harry snorted. "Why not just put poison on the knives and get it over with? Why not just shoot me down?"

"Oh, no," the doctor said. "We couldn't attack with guns. There were too many outsiders about."

Harry laughed. "Come on, Doc," he said derisively. "You've got to be kidding."

"Oh, no," Gosha repeated reasonably. "The Seppuku Swords are based on a system of honor. We detest the use of unnecessary violence."

Harry's laughter was cut short by the memory of the two dead

Chinese at the wax museum and the woman at the institute holding the knife at the little girl's throat. "You sure have a funny way of living up to it," Harry said.

The doctor leaned in to Harry's metal operating table on wheels. "Our soldiers are young and eager to prove themselves."

"Your soldiers are bloodthirsty and eager for thrills," Harry corrected him.

Gosha seemed to consider this for a second. "They can be difficult to control in the field," he said, as a compromise. "They will do anything necessary to succeed in their missions," he then added in defense.

"Like raping and choking an innocent girl?" Harry suggested lightly, his eyes still closed, his nose aimed at the ceiling.

"Sexual assault breeds fear in the enemy's ranks," Gosha announced. Harry opened his eyes, looked at the doctor and then pointedly looked at Suni. "Oh, no," said Gosha a third time. "The other was *Chinese."*

"That makes it all right, then?" Harry asked. "I can think of easier ways to die."

"Your death will not be easy, Inspector Callahan," another, stronger voice from behind Harry suddenly said. He shifted his head back to see an upside-down version of a muscular young man in the doorway of the wide room. "The girl in the wax museum was Chinese," the young man repeated with intensity. "So she was not innocent. She was lovers with the Thunderfist. This was a double condemnation. She deserved to die."

As he spoke, the man swaggered over to the operating table. Harry's eyes followed his approach. Once the man had finished his declaration, Harry raised his head to drink in his facial characteristics. "Do we know each other?" he asked lightly.

"We met," the man smugly replied. "On the stairs of your apartment building."

Harry immediately tried to leap up and wrap his hands around the man's neck. Only then did he realize he was strapped to the metal table by the wrists, waist and ankles.

The young man laughed. "You were falling in chop suey at the time, as I recall," he said sarcastically. "Hardly what I would call a formal introduction." The young Japanese stood up straight. "So allow me to introduce myself. I am Goh Nakadai, the Seppuku Sword's first Field Lieutenant."

Harry groaned elaborately. "Doesn't anyone around here have a name like Tom or Bob?" he asked sarcastically.

"My brother's name was Larry," Nakadai said quietly. "You shot

him in the back on the street in front of the apartments." Harry looked into the young man's eyes. They were burning with a hate that spanned the history of the Nakadai family tree. Lieutenant Bressler had been right; hell hath no fury like a Oriental gang member "shamed."

Dr. Gosha put a hand on the young man's arm. "Goh. There is no time for that. The man is captured and harmless. The girl is still in our possession. We must prepare for the meeting. Inagaki's treachery knows no bounds. We must be ready for any eventuality. Please, continue instructing the others."

Reluctantly, Nakadai looked away from Harry's face, then abruptly left the room. Gosha looked sympathetically at the tall, bound cop. "You have killed a member of his clan," the doctor sighed. "He is honor bound to kill you in return. I am afraid that once the summit meeting occurs, there is nothing I can do to help you, no matter what the outcome."

Callahan grimaced, trying the strength of the straps that binded him. "That's all right, Doctor," Harry said, letting a touch of sarcasm remain in his voice. "You've done quite enough already."

But Gosha felt duty bound to plead his case. He leaped up from his chair, producing a scalpel from his pocket. He held it close to Callahan's chin. "You do not understand my situation," he seethed. "I could have had you killed just as easily as I could plunge this blade into you now. But I did not." That didn't stop him from keeping the scalpel poised over Harry's face, however. "Instead I had you brought here, away from innocent Chicago citizens, to be with the woman you so desperately sought.

"It is important that you understand, Inspector. The situation is far graver than you could ever imagine. If the Kozure Ronin succeed in their attempt to take over the entire Nihonmachi underworld, seas of innocent blood will be spilled. Inagaki cares not for the old ways. He is only interested in power. The Seppuku Swords must be in charge. We will bring honor and control to the organization. Inagaki promises only death and terror!"

Harry waited until the doctor had calmed somewhat. He stopped his ranting abruptly, swallowed and blinked several times. He looked at the scalpel in his hand as if it were an alien artifact, then slipped it back into his coat pocket. He sat back down heavily on the folding chair next to the operating table.

"I'll tell you the truth," Harry said, once the doctor's diatribe had ended. "I don't give a shit about Inagaki, the Nihonmachi underworld, or the street gangs. All I care about is the girl."

“Then that is too bad,” said the doctor sadly. “Because she is the focal point of the entire fight. Whoever has her will be the determining factor in the war. If we keep her, Inagaki is powerless to go against us. But if he has her, there will be nothing to keep him from calling his entire army down on us. There will be many deaths, and not all of them Japanese and Chinamen.”

Harry turned his head to look into Suni’s sleeping face. “Drugged?” he asked.

“Yes,” the doctor replied. “On and off for three days. Once every twenty-four hours she is awakened for the intake of nourishment and the output of excrement.” Leave it to a doctor to find the “civilized” equivalent for saying “eating and shitting.”

“She’ll have to die no matter what happens,” Harry said suddenly.

Gosha started at the notion. “How can you know that?” he wondered.

Harry turned his head to look at the man. “Even if Inagaki backs down this time, there’ll be no holding him back once you release her. You have no choice but to hold on to her as long as possible. But somewhere along the line, she is going to die.” Harry looked back at the sweating face of the girl. “She’s as good as dead already.”

“It is true,” the cop heard from behind him. “We can only hope to build our strength in the interim, so Inagaki cannot defeat us once her captivity is ended.”

Harry turned a final time toward Gosha. “This is your idea of justice, isn’t it?” he seethed. “Let the condemned share their final moments together.” He said it as if spitting.

Gosha’s expression of sympathy and concern turned to a hard, disapproving frown. “Appreciate it,” he warned. “It is all you have left.”

With that, the little man got up and walked to a rolling table at the end of Harry’s platform. He prepared an injection and returned to the cop’s side.

“The meeting is not far-off,” the Japanese said. “There is much to do. I suggest you examine your feelings and value your remaining moments. Prepare yourself for the inevitable conclusion.”

Gosha pulled back Harry’s sleeve and jabbed the needle into his vein. Callahan felt an immediate rush of dizziness. “You can’t keep us here forever,” he said groggily, trying to stay awake.

“No one will find you,” he heard Gosha say from a great distance. “Japanese interns took you as soon as you were admitted to the hospital. You were not even registered. No one knows you or the girl

exist."

The last word echoed off into a deep pool. Floating in this dark pool was a windowless van. As Harry got closer to the inky pit of liquid, the vehicle's side doors opened and a Chinaman scrambled out, his head completely engulfed in flame. The Chinese dove into the liquid, his burning head sending up a torrent of steam. The steam cloud cleared to reveal a cat with its stomach slit open. Even though its guts trailed behind it, the cat was still alive. It howled and fell into the liquid after the Chinaman. Harry's point of view changed until he was right over the dark, deep pool. Then it exploded in his face.

Callahan's eyelids snapped open, and he shook his head to clear the liquid from his face. He gasped for breath, hearing the raucous laughter of many men. When his vision cleared he could see Goh Nakadai standing beside him, a dripping bedpan in his hand.

"Rise and shine, Inspector Callahan," the man called derisively. "Time to get up."

Harry screwed his eyes shut and snapped them open again, trying to clear his face of the sleeping grit and the urine Goh had thrown. The urine had combined with his own drug-induced sweat to create an awful stink. His nightmare had also been drug-induced, but that didn't help Harry to shake off its effects. It was the first dream he'd had in years.

Spitting some of the noxious liquid from his mouth, the cop managed to croak, "The meeting . . . ?"

"Not over yet," Goh answered. "Not even started. But Dr. Gosha isn't here now. I'm not waiting for the outcome of the summit to make sure you get what's coming to you."

Harry raised his head. Suni was still asleep on the other metal table, but between them at least eight other young Japanese stood. Beside Nakadai was one man with his left arm in a sling. By his size and the expression on his face, Harry guessed that this was the Uzi user he had wounded in San Francisco. Although the wounded man and Nakadai were without weapons, the other seven people were armed with the best terrorist weapons blood money could buy.

"Unstrap him," Nakadai instructed, moving back so the seven hirelings could do his bidding. One man undid the buckles at his wrists, another undid the table's belt, and a third released his ankles. Harry saw he was still without shoes. He moved his limbs to return the proper circulation as well as to check his shoulder holster. His arm rubbed an empty pocket of leather. The .44 Magnum was probably with the shoes.

"Get up," Nakadai ordered with disgust. Harry saw no reason to

belie the image of a stiff, groggy, submissive captive, so he struggled off the table and dropped to the floor in a crouch. Nakadai kicked him in the side.

"Stand," he demanded. Callahan slowly stretched, but not quite to his full height. He kept his shoulders hunched and his arms bent at his side. From that position he could finally get a clear look at where he and Suni were secreted.

It was a deserted, out-of-service, out-of-use operating room. He stood in its center, next to one of two metal operating tables. Suni was strapped down to the other. Beside her was a rolling table of drugs and syringes. There were several stands for transfusion sacks as well as a dusty but complete oxygen setup. The unlit lamp above his table was attached to a stand. And across the room, along one wall, nine feet off the ground, was a clear section of glass which revealed a theaterlike setup. In the old days, other doctors had watched the presiding surgeon at work.

"Get going," Nakadai told the cop, shoving him toward the door. Harry pivoted slightly toward the man, just to gauge the response. It was impressive. All the other eight men surged forward, making it clear that Harry's pivoting days were numbered. "Don't be stupid," Nakadai sneered. "Just keep moving."

The group marched toward the door. Two gun-wielding Seppukus exited first, checking the hallway. With a nod of their heads, Nakadai pushed Harry forward again, knocking him against the room's two swinging doors. The hall was as deserted as the operating room. It showed the wear and tear of a forgotten section of a closed hospital. The only illumination was sunlight from outside, and that was dim in the bleak hallway. The entire place smelled both musty and antiseptic.

The gang of nine accompanied Harry to the room next door. It was the mirror image of the other operating area, except for one detail. Instead of a rolling table with drugs and syringes, this table was full of scalpels, saws, and clamps.

"Your death will be long, precise, and excruciatingly painful," Nakadai promised, pulling a Japanese-made 9mm Nambu Model 57A automatic from his jacket. It looked almost exactly like the American Colt .45 except for the butt and barrel tapering. Whatever the model, it could do extreme damage. "Get on the table."

Callahan balked. "You doing the killing yourself?" he asked archly, looking over his shoulder.

"I said, get on the table!" Nakadai repeated, jabbing the Nambu painfully into Harry's kidney. Callahan gritted his teeth and stood his ground. "Letting your friends do the work, huh?" he said, smiling with

an evil satisfaction.

“We’re all doing the job,” the man with the sling suddenly revealed, his voice barely controlled. He moved forward to pound Harry on the back of the head, but Nakadai held him back.

“This shall be a team effort,” the young man said calmly, trying to instill a greater fear into the cop. “We are all interns and orderlies at the hospital. We have seen enough operations to know exactly how to cause the greatest pain. Larry was a good friend of us all. We will take great pleasure in peeling your skin from you and then digging deeper.”

“Safety in numbers, huh?” Harry went on, unaffected. “Get some kind of kick working me over together? Afraid you couldn’t take it alone?”

The man in the sling jumped forward again. This time his fist connected with Harry’s ear. A large high-school ring on his finger cut Callahan’s flesh. Harry did not raise a hand to feel the wound or stem the new flow of blood.

“Big man,” Harry said, turning. “Real big when there are a couple of guys around with sub-machine guns. But do you have the guts to rip my skin without your friends? Could you even handle it if I was strapped down? Could you stay alone in the room with me and tear me apart?”

“Give me a gun!” the man in the sling yelled, jumping against Nakadai’s outstretched arm. “I will kill you here. Now! Myself!”

“Kenji,” Nakadai named him. “No. Can’t you see he’s trying to goad you? That he’s trying to shame you even though he faces death?”

“What are you afraid of, Gohy?” Harry demanded in a taunting tone. “Afraid of anybody with balls? Afraid to find out you couldn’t hack it? What’s the matter? You get a thrill out of all these guys? You afraid I’ll find out what you’re really made of?”

Callahan kept laying it on fast and thick. He had to make one of them attack him. He knew that if they got him strapped to the table, nothing short of a miracle would save him.

“What is it? You afraid I’ll find out you raped the girl in there like you raped the girl in the museum?” Harry saw the two terrorists start slightly at that. He had struck a chord. Immediately, he started to play on it. “You afraid I’ll find out you slipped a little bit and stuck your fucking cock into her?”

“That’s enough!” Nakadai roared, shaking with proud anger.

“Or you afraid I’ll find out you didn’t rape the girl?” Harry rolled right on. “That you couldn’t, even if you tried? That you tried and

couldn't get it up. That's it, isn't it? You didn't rape anybody because you knew you didn't have the balls!"

"Shut up, pig!" the man in the sling screamed, breaking out from behind Nakadai. He raced forward. "I'll show you!" he shouted, and kicked Harry between the legs.

The rest of the men jumped back in surprise as Harry doubled over, his face purple. Perfect, the cop thought as he tried to breathe and clutched at his crotch.

Even Kenji was surprised by his own act. He stumbled back, looking at the aggravated Nakadai in wonder and supplication. His face held that look throughout eternity.

Because suddenly Harry straightened out and surged forward in a dive, the thin stiletto he had taken from the corpse in the Oriental Institute elevator in his hand.

He pulled the double-edged blade hard across Kenji's throat as he passed. He grabbed Goh's gun hand and twisted him around, wrenching the Japanese's arm behind his back and shoving the stiletto tip against his chin.

Kenji's arms went out as the waterfall of blood surged out of his chopped neck. The crimson wave rose before his eyes. Those eyes bulged and his head snapped back at an inhuman angle. His tongue thrust out of his mouth as he desperately tried to say something. Anything. All he could do was choke and drown in his own blood. He took two faltering steps forward, his hands trying to grip the empty air. The other men jumped back from him. Finally he fell against the operating table, his blood splashing across its metal surface.

He stood like that for a moment, looking like a parched drinker at a neighborhood bar. His eyes then rolled back into his skull and he fell sideways, knocking the tray of surgical equipment to the floor.

As the scalpels and saws scattered across the gray, blood-flecked tile, Harry brought all attention back to him.

"All right punks," he barked. "Let's see what kind of samurai you are. Here I am. You can kill me. All you have to do is shoot through your first lieutenant here. Come on. Let's see what kind of sacrifice you can make."

Callahan's street-wise psychology was on the money. Nakadai was their spiritual leader. Without him, they were nothing. Without him, they would realize just what kind of mindless lemmings they were. All the men tensed and brought up their guns, but no one pulled the trigger.

Nakadai desperately tried to fire his own automatic—simply as a

catalyst—but Harry had flicked on the safety when he pulled the Japanese's arm up his back.

"Go ahead!" Goh yelled to his troops. "Shoot! Kill him!"

"Save your breath, asshole," Harry told him, pulling him back toward the door and shoving the stiletto point harder under his chin. Harry had taken the blade while riding down in the elevator. Using his shoelaces, he had strapped the thin knife to the inside of his thigh, nestled against his testicles. That was why the elevator doors had taken so long in opening. Harry was leaning on the "Door Closed" button, slipping the thing in place.

He couldn't find time to use it then, but it certainly came in handy now.

"Forget me!" Nakadai was screaming. "Kill him! It is he you will be killing! I will be in a better place! Shoot! Shoot!"

Callahan had their backs against the operating room's doors as the seven remaining gang members looked at each other in frustrated confusion. Harry was about to kick the doors wide when Nakadai spoke a final time.

"I tell you . . . !" he began, then abruptly cut his words off. Harry was immediately aware of the danger, but before he could do anything about it, Nakadai thrust his head right into Harry's upturned stiletto blade.

"Shit," Harry hissed. Blood began to pour out of Goh's chin and over Harry's hand. Nakadai pushed his chin all the way down on the blade until his skin hit the hilt guard. Callahan felt the razor-sharp, six-inch blade go through his dental plates, rip across his nostrils, and settle somewhere behind his eye. A strange, relieved sigh bubbled out his lips.

Callahan didn't loosen his grip or pull away. Nakadai was still his only protection, living or dead. Harry ripped the Nambu automatic out of the Seppuku's dying fingers and started blasting over the man's left shoulder.

His first couple of shots took the others by surprise. They still hadn't gotten over the shock of their leader's suicide. But once Harry's first two bullets banged into the chest of a Seppuku next to Kenji's corpse, they snapped out of their sudden mourning.

If Nakadai hadn't yet died from the knife wound, the next hail of lead certainly killed him. Harry ducked behind the kid's muscular torso, releasing the knife hilt, as the half-dozen living gang members smashed the operating room's doors apart with bullets.

Callahan propelled himself back, leaving Nakadai's body to the

ages. The doors burst open behind him, then swung closed on the martyred Seppuku's head. Harry fell and slid across the hall as rounds of bullets made it through the double doors and slapped against the tile walls. The cop quickly crawled toward Suni's room, calculating the doors. The Nambu had an eight-round magazine. He had already used two rounds on one person, leaving him six for the remaining half-dozen. One bullet each, if Nakadai had loaded it completely.

Harry didn't have time to check. He got to his feet against the near wall just as the doors behind him burst open again, and the enraged, vengeful Seppukus came pouring out, sending slugs spinning before them. Harry rolled against the wall as the lead whipped all around him, chancing to snap a shot off into the crowd just before hurling himself into the original operating room.

He had no time to stop then. He ran by Suni's table, pulling it over toward him. The platform lazily drifted down and picked up just a bit of speed before it clanged heavily on its side. Suni was kept on top by the straps. Harry overturned the table he had vacated and jumped behind the metal cover. Now both tables were on their sides, their legs and bottoms pointed toward the door.

Harry looked over the rim just in time to see a Seppuku leap across the seats in the operating theater above him. Harry and the man shot at the same time. Callahan was not used to the 9mm weapon so his slug tore up the back of a chair in front of the Japanese. The terrorist didn't have to aim, since he was using an Ingram MAC 11. An entire pane of glass blasted outward, and the bullets thunked across the tile floor, zinged across the table, and splattered on the wall behind Harry's head.

Callahan readjusted his aim and shot again. The bullet grazed the Seppuku's temple. He stumbled, tripped on a chair back, dropped his gun and dove out another pane in the observatory setup. He fell screaming to the floor, landing heavily on his face in front of the oxygen and sleeping-gas tanks.

It was then that Harry saw his only chance. He had used five bullets, and he was only sure of eliminating two of the remaining men. As the four remaining terrorists came running into the room, guns blazing, Callahan put his desperate plan into action.

Crouching on one knee, he grabbed the sides of the metal table and swung it upward. He rose with it, so that the metal was always covering his full body from the Japanese, except for his fingers. He stood the table on its end and stood behind it.

The Seppukus had been firing wildly when they first burst in. This rising table had given them a target to shoot at. They turned all their

guns on the surface as one, at the same moment as Harry stuck the Nambu out and emptied the clip into the oxygen tanks.

One of the two was empty. The bullet slammed through its outer shell and ricocheted off the inside, useless. The second was almost full and still pressurized. As soon as two 9mm rounds burst through it, the entire tank exploded.

Harry was hurled back against the wall by the blast, the metal table slamming into him and sandwiching him there. Suni's table was moved, but her weight kept it from going too far. The Seppukus got the deadly worst of it. The shock wave knocked them over and the fast-spreading metal shards ripped into their bodies. All four men, including the one Harry hadn't realized he'd wounded in the hall, were torn apart, almost as if they had been shoved into a shredder.

The hunks of debris bashed into the other side of the table, leaving warped indentations. Several pieces managed to break through, burning Harry's legs. But in seconds, it was all over. The tornado of shards had stopped, and the air was clear of lead. The room seemed perfectly still for a moment, save for the rhythmic rising and falling of Suni's chest. Then the metal table standing against the wall creaked outward.

It balanced on its edge for a moment, then toppled flat. Harry stumbled out behind it. He fell to the floor next to the unconscious Suni. From a prone position and breathing deeply, Harry undid her straps. She fell into his arms. Harry pulled her and himself painfully up to a sitting position. He held her, rationalizing that he was checking for any shard wounds.

She was still wearing her leotard and sheer stockings. She was untouched by any cuts or slices. There was a run and a bruise here and there, but Harry chalked that up to her brutal abduction.

He looked into her calm, sleeping visage, and then gently moved the strands of hair off her face. He held her for a second, then got up. He carried her out of the room and went looking for a phone.

CHAPTER

Eight

Their prison turned out to be an unused wing of a hospital on Chicago's South Side—only a hop, skip, and a jump from the university campus. Dr. Gosha had been right. It was easy to disappear in the huge place. Besides the deserted section, a new section was being constructed. An unconscious patient could be admitted, brought to the bowels of the building without being registered, and only show up later as part of the foundation, as it were.

Harry had found a phone, and then found a utility closet. He needed several things to make good his escape. He put on a doctor's coat, wrapped a stethoscope around his neck, and pulled on a pair of hospital slippers. He set Suni up on another stretcher and pulled a sheet over her body up to her chin.

He didn't want to wake the girl yet. He had blown the on-duty Seppukus to kingdom come the way Sheriff Brody had killed the monster in *Jaws,* but the biggest and deadliest shark was still in Chicago waters. And they weren't on dry land yet. Callahan would have to get her crosstown to the airport and on a plane back to San Francisco before he'd risk disturbing her equilibrium.

Making sure the Nambu was secure in his waistband—reloaded with extra 9mm rounds from the destroyed submachine guns—Harry ventured into the in-service hospital hall. The large establishment was too crowded and too busy for anyone to really notice a doctor with no name tag, pushing an Oriental patient with no room, no chart, no I.D. bracelet and no illness. Harry headed for the Emergency Department, hoping things would be too hectic there for anyone to question his bringing an unconscious woman home with him.

As he moved smoothly down the halls, pushing Suni in front of him, he noticed the angle of the light coming through the windows. It was late afternoon—almost time for the Nihonmachi summit meeting to start. It was also getting close to rush hour on a Friday, the worst driving period of the week. If they got caught in traffic, there would still be a chance of an alarm going out.

Callahan picked up his speed toward the emergency-arrivals lounge. As he turned the corner, he saw Dr. Izo Gosha leaning over a burn victim. To stop now would draw more attention, so Harry plowed on,

almost positive that Gosha would not notice another doctor, especially since the Oriental was sure the cop was still imprisoned in the dead wing. Just to make sure, Harry casually flipped the sheet over Suni's face. He walked right by the crime boss without Gosha lifting an eyebrow.

Harry had almost gotten to the door when his cover was blown by a black nurse.

"Doctor, are you mad?" she asked from behind her desk in a strident voice. "Get that thing out of here. These are emergency patients!"

Immediately all the patients forgot their own wounds and wanted to know why it was so important to get "that thing out". An instantaneous, concentrated babble went on with Harry right in the middle of it. He was about to push the stretcher out the glass door when he was blocked by a well-meaning intern.

"You need any help, Doctor?"

"No thank you," said Harry quietly, hardly moving his lips off his teeth. "I was just leaving."

"Not that way, you're not!" the strident nurse called out, seemingly possessed of superhearing. "I'm surprised at you, Doctor, bringing a cadaver through emergency and trying to move it out the arrival door."

The stupid nurse set the fuse, lit it, and then, for good measure, pushed the plunger. The emergency room went into an immediate uproar on top of its usual chaos. The shocked patients had no way of knowing that even a real corpse could not hurt them unless it was a bubonic-plague carrier. It was hardly explainable now. Gosha was practically forced to look up.

The Oriental did a double take on the back of Callahan's head. He looked at the "doctor's" feet, then excused himself, and hastily moved toward the hospital's interior. Harry glanced over his shoulder at Gosha's retreating figure.

"Is there anything I can do for you, Doctor?" the intern asked again.

"Yes," said Harry sweetly, and then grabbed the man's lapels. With a single sweeping throw, Harry hurled the intern right into the black nurse's midsection. The man fell on his ass, but the woman was knocked back into her wheeled deck chair. She rolled back three feet, hit the side of a desk, and toppled over backward.

Callahan didn't see her slapstick tumble. His mind working and his stomach twisting, he pushed Suni's stretcher out the double doors and right into the back of a parked ambulance. As he secured her inside,

the ambulance's driver came running from the wall, a cup of coffee sloshing in his hand.

"Hey!" he yelled. "We just dropped somebody off. We don't do pickups!"

Harry pulled out the 9mm automatic with one hand and grabbed the guy's shirt front with the other. "The keys," he said, no question involved.

"In the ignition," the driver replied in a small voice, his styrofoam cup dropping to the ground.

Harry raced to the driver's side, pulled open the door, threw the gun on the passenger's seat and twisted the key. The sleek, low Cadillac ambulance started up and Harry jammed it into gear. The vehicle screeched out the hospital lane and roared up Columbus Drive.

Harry checked his watch. It had stopped sometime last night. He checked the open sky. It was about three-thirty. If he was lucky, he just might beat the traffic and make it clear sailing to the airport.

He was not lucky. As soon as he got on the open road, the ambulance radio crackled. "Car seven-one-niner," came a voice. "Car seven-one-niner. See the woman Madison and Clark."

Harry pulled the mike up to his lips while keeping an eye in the rear-view mirror. "No can do, dispatch," he said. "Have an emergency at the airport."

"God damn it. Cletus," the radio voice barked back. "You don't make the assignments, I do!"

"An emergency, boss," Harry retorted. "A cop pulled me over and told me to follow him."

"That's a likely excuse, you miserable goldbricker," the radio voice wailed. "You get to Madison and Clark on the double!"

"No can do," said Harry.

"I'll call the fucking cops on you!"

'You do that," Harry concluded. "Take this job and shove it." He threw the mike onto the floor, the dispatcher's voice crackling on.

As Callahan looked back to the road with a slight grin, he saw a dark sedan coming up fast from behind. All his humor left him. Old Doc Gosha must've done some fast talking. With the summit meeting set, the town was probably crammed with Nihonmachi soldiers from all over. And these guys knew Chicago a lot better than Harry did.

Harry picked up speed and set the lights to flashing and the siren to wailing. Sure enough, even though he couldn't see what nationality the occupants were, the dark sedan behind him picked up an equal

amount of speed. Just as the ambulance passed the Natural History Museum on the right, another car screeched onto Columbus from Lake Shore Drive. As it squealed behind the other sedan in a cloud of dust, Harry could see its CB antennae waving at him from the trunk.

The bastards were communicating, Harry realized, and working to cut him off at the pass. The most likely route to O'Hare was to Eisenhower Expressway, which connected to the John F. Kennedy route that went right through the airport. Harry saw no way he could pull that off now. It was the direction all the soldiers expected him to go in.

Soaring by Grant Park, Harry suddenly wrenched the wheel all the way over to the left, sending the ambulance skidding across the length of the road and wavering like a jelly bean on a table's ledge. The tires burned rubber, and Harry fought the wheel like a sea captain in a storm until the vehicle righted itself and shot down the left-hand street.

The two sedans were not so skilled. The first one took the left, braking as it turned. The second car tried to make the turn at full speed, smashing into the first car's side head-on. The first car pushed off the road and rolled across the brush end over end. The second car hardly paused. It stalled slightly, but its momentum kept it going to the left until its engine caught again and it picked up steam.

Harry crossed the Michigan and Wabash intersections with little trouble because of his siren. The second car had neither the siren nor the lights on its side. It tried to run a red light only to have a taxi shave off its rear end. Both autos screamed in wrenching, twisting rage. The taxi swerved completely around in the intersection—the cars behind stopping just in time—as the Nihonmachi pursuers swerved, but didn't straighten, only to smash into the side of a bus idling at the curb.

Callahan took another quick left on State Street, then pulled the wheel right just as two more cars, ones that matched the First Union City getaway vehicles perfectly, leaped onto his tail. Harry didn't like the looks of this. These two cars were sticking to his bumper like bears to honey. There was a lot more horsepower under their hoods than it first appeared.

As the ambulance streaked across the Dearborn and Clark intersections, the new pair of pursuers made their move. Each one tried pulling up beside the long, low Cadillac. Harry pulled the wheel back and forth, weaving in front of the chase cars, cutting off their roadways. As the three cars crossed LaSalle, one started ramming and the other squeezed in between the ambulance's right side and the curb.

Harry pulled to the left, then cut right viciously, trying to squash the parallel vehicle. He heard the squeal of bending metal and burning rubber, then was hit from behind again. The ambulance practically vaulted through the Wells Street intersection and headed for the narrow bridge which crossed over the Chicago River.

The rear car leaped forward to flank the ambulance's left side as the caravan left solid ground. Callahan was now sandwiched between the two pace cars. He glanced out his window as the left car crept up alongside. He was astonished to see Izo Gosha in the passenger seat of the chase car, pleading with him through the closed window to give Suni back.

Gosha was screaming something about it "being our only hope," and "Inagaki will kill." Callahan couldn't believe the desperation which led the man to make such a foolhardy move. But then he realized that Gosha's fate would be sealed if he ran the ambulance off the road or tried any other kind of force. He needed Suni alive, so all he could do was work on Harry's sense of "honor and control."

In response, the inspector pushed the accelerator to the floor. He looked ahead in time to see two police cars heading for them from the opposite direction. There was no way out other than braking or ramming the cop cars head-on. Harry ripped his foot off the accelerator and slammed down on the brake.

Gosha's car did not do likewise. It slammed right into the cop cars, one headlight burying itself into each engine. The patrol cars spun out, making the top part of a giant "Y." Harry's vehicle skidded to the right, its superior weight smashing the other chase car off the road. Only this time there was no shoulder to roll on. The right chase car vaulted over the bridge's guard rail and plunged hood-first into the river.

The ambulance rammed the guard rail, but it had braked enough to stop. Harry was thrown against the dashboard and then dropped between the driver's and passenger's seats. All the wounds he had accumulated in the last day started yelling for attention. His side, his wrist, and his legs were all sending lancing pains up to his mind's reception center. It felt like a master musician was playing his body with ice picks.

The front of the car was suddenly illuminated by flames. Seconds later, Harry heard a whoosh coming from his left. He cautiously pulled himself halfway up to see Gosha's and the cop cars engulfed in flames. Then he became aware of more light behind him. He whirled around to see that the rear door of the ambulance was open and Suni was gone from the stretcher.

He was immediately up on his feet. He wrenched down the handle and kicked open the door. He dropped to the road to find himself staring down the business end of Sergeant Terry Inagaki's regulation .357 Python.

"It was child's play to find you." Inagaki gloated in his bedroom. "We always survey the CB channels. Poor Gosha was so rattled by your escape that he blabbed your escape route all over the airways. Poor, poor man. He must have thought no one would understand the significance of his directions. I, of course, understood perfectly. And then, when the regular police channels reported an ambulance stolen, it was just a matter of putting two and two together."

Suni was lying, still blessedly unconscious, on the bed. Harry was standing in the corner, his hands cuffed in front of him. For extra protection, Denise Inagaki kept the Nambu automatic trained on his chest. She looked like she knew exactly how to use it. Tetsuya Inagaki was standing by his closet, slowly donning ceremonial garb. He already had on the baggy gray pants and pointed shoulder jacket bearing his family crests over his kimono.

"I had, of course, suspected that they were holding my dear sister at the hospital, but I couldn't do a thing about it," Inagaki rattled on. "One move in that direction and they would have killed her. But thanks to you, she is free, and the Gosha clan with their Seppuku Swords are doomed." Inagaki stopped dressing for a moment and thought about it. "The good doctor must have realized that at the end. It is the only reason he rammed the police cars. He knew his shame and disgrace would lead to hari-kiri, so he took the easy way out."

Harry grimaced. As if getting into a head-on collision was easy, he thought. He also thought about the dozens of Kozure Ronin outside the house. They were not allowed inside while their leader and master prepared himself, so they waited to accompany him to the summit meeting.

"Why don't you take the easy way out?" Harry asked. "Why go to the meeting at all? Gosha's dead. Suni is free. You have no more opposition."

"There is always opposition," Inagaki professed. "I will go to the meeting to show my power, to show my dedication, and to show my conviction." He turned toward Harry. "You, unfortunately, will not be there to see it." He reached into the closet and threw out a few things. "You'll be needing these to meet your Christian God," Inagaki said sardonically.

Harry's shoes and .44 Magnum fell to the carpet. "After your little

party at the Oriental Institute," Inagaki explained, "the police were called to the scene. Naturally they chose me to go. And naturally I confiscated these. The bullets are downtown unfortunately."

"When do I die?" Harry inquired evenly.

"When we leave," Tetsuya answered, pulling his set of samurai swords out of the closet.

"And Suni?" Harry softly asked.

The Inagakis looked at Harry at the same time. "So you know," Denise whispered.

"It only makes sense," Harry replied indifferently. "I asked myself over and over why you didn't just let the girl die and eradicate the Seppukus anyway. The answer was that if she died by the hands of the enemy or even in the enemy camp, it would bring your family such shame that your peers would no longer respect you. They would not follow you.

"But if she was freed, you could not take the chance of her falling into enemy hands again. Like you said, there's always opposition. And what better way to display your 'dedication and conviction' than bring to the summit meeting the head of your sister."

Inagaki smiled and stood straight up, looking at Harry with new respect. He nodded. It was a royal decree. Callahan was allowed to continue.

"This insane act will display your sacrifice and nobility. This is what you are willing to give up to become Nihonmachi ruler. You will be looked upon with great respect and honor."

Inagaki's chest swelled with pride as he slipped the two samurai swords into his sash. His eyes sparkled with the dreams of conquest and total power.

At that second, a Kozure Ronin came stumbling into the room, his mouth working.

"You fool!" Denise Inagaki cried. "How dare you enter your master's chambers?" She swung the Nambu toward the trespasser. Harry saw his opening and made his move. He brought both fists across the woman's face. She sailed across the room, slamming into the stumbling Japanese. They both went down, the angle of their fall revealing a long, deep slit across the Kozure's throat. The soldier had been garroted.

Harry jumped for the pile of yellow flesh, plucking the Nambu from Denise's still hands. He spun to point it at Tetsuya, who had jumped onto the bed and held Suni up in front of him, his short sword blade at her throat. It was a Mexican standoff, Japanese style.

“What have you done?” Inagaki demanded, his shoulders shaking. “What is going on?”

Harry held the gun straight and solidly in front of him, both cuffed hands wrapped around the butt. If it had been his .44, he wouldn’t have thought twice about blowing the man’s brains out. But he wasn’t sure where the 9mm round would go.

“You ever wonder how I got to the Oriental Institute in the first place?” he said instead of shooting. “I’ll tell you. The Seppuku Swords called me there themselves. They sent a little package over to my hotel inviting me there. It was a trap, fine. *But how the hell did they know I was in town and on the trail?*

“You didn’t tell them. You had too much to lose if I didn’t get your sister back. The Seppuku Sword kidnappers didn’t know who I was when they attacked the apartment house, so who the hell told them all about me and where I’d be staying and what I was doing?”

“The Chinese,” Inagaki said, in the shock of realization.

“The Chinese,” Harry affirmed. “They had the most to lose if you gained power. They had to look forward to years of bloody war as you tried to spread your influence everywhere. They wanted me in the middle so I could lead them to *you.”* Inagaki’s face grew deathly white. His hand gripped the hilt of the blade near Suni’s throat more tightly.

“I made a call from the hospital,” Harry continued. “I called my man in Chinatown and accused him of setting me up. He was happy to admit it. Then he suggested that since I helped them out, they would help me out. You hear those noises outside?” Harry paused so Inagaki could listen to the distant fighting. “That’s the sound of the first Chinese-Japanese battle. And the last.”

Inagaki grew absolutely livid, his whole body quaking. “You may have destroyed the Kozure Ronin!” he shouted, “but you will not save Suni! I will slit her throat right before your eyes!”

Harry’s finger was already depressing the Nambu’s trigger when he saw Suni’s eyes and mouth snap open. She quickly grabbed her brother’s sword hand and sunk her teeth into it. Tetsuya screamed, dropped the blade and reared up. For a second, Harry had the man dead to rights, caught smack dab in the line of a 9mm gun barrel across a bedroom.

But at the last possible moment, he pulled the gun up, unfired.

Inagaki stared at him with bulging eyes for a split second before taking advantage of the reprieve. He leaped off the bed and dived through the window. Harry turned when he heard a scraping noise behind him. He looked back to see Denise Inagaki crawling out of the

room. Harry let her go, too. He stood in place for a moment, looking calmly at the alive, awake Suni. His expression was divided between affection and exhaustion.

"No one could sleep through a date with you," she said, then started to cry. Harry walked over to the bed, sat down, and held her until her tears were spent.

She had awakened shortly after Tetsuya transferred her from the crashed ambulance to his car. Confused, groggy, and terrified, she thought it best to play possum until action was absolutely mandatory. She explained that she knew about her brother, but had renounced her whole family before moving to San Francisco.

"You didn't have to let him get away to spare my feelings," she said bravely.

Harry smiled, his eyes veiled and distant. He gently kissed her, then led her out of the house. The yard was a macabre scene of almost a dozen Chinese lawn jockies. All trace of anything vaguely Japanese had disappeared. The Inagaki house was far enough away from its neighbors so no one heard the quiet, but deadly Tiger Claw attack.

Harry asked Suni to wait in the car. She moved silently among the Chinese to sit in the vehicle Harry had directed her to. Then the cop turned back into the house, followed by the Chinese. Back in the bedroom, Mr. and Mrs. Tetsuya Inagaki were bound spread-eagled, side by side, on their massive bed. They were both tightly gagged, their eyes bulging pleadingly over the silencing material.

The Chinese circled the bed without a word, their raincoats unbuttoned, their hands down, except for one man who was talking into the bedside phone. "Inspector Callahan?" he suddenly said to Harry. The inspector looked from the writhing bodies of the Japanese couple to the Chinese holding the phone receiver out. "He wants to talk to you."

Harry took the phone. "Hello?" On the other end was the unmistakable voice of Huang Cheh.

"I am told that you had a perfect opportunity to take revenge on Inagaki yourself, yet you let him escape. Why?"

"Because I knew he wouldn't get far," Harry tiredly answered, the weight of the executioner on his shoulders. He glanced over at Tetsuya, who was looking at him in amazement. "And I knew you would put him to a death more befitting his life." He took a second to speak directly to the Inagakis. "Yours will be honorable deaths," he told them. "Warriors' deaths. You will go to a land much better than this."

When he returned his attention to the phone, he heard laughter on

the other end. “What’s so funny?” he asked as each Chinese took a razor-sharp hatchet out from under his coat and held it over a different part of the Japaneses’ bound body. Four were over the Inagakis’ hands. Four more over their feet. Four more at their elbows. Four more at their knees.

“For the first time in all the years we’ve known each other,” the crime boss chuckled, “I know why they call you ‘Dirty Harry.’ ”

Inspector Callahan hung up and left the house just before the Chinese chopped off the first of many Inagaki limbs.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DANE HARTMAN was a Warner Books imprint pseudonym used by two American novelists, Ric Meyers and Leslie Alan Horvitz. "Hartman" was credited as the author of the Dirty Harry action series based on the “Dirty” Harry Callahan character of the popular 1970’s and 1980’s films starring Clint Eastwood.

Following the release of the third Dirty Harry movie, The Enforcer, in 1976, Clint Eastwood made it clear that he did not intend to make any more Dirty Harry movies. In 1981, Warner Books (the publishing arm of Warner Bros., which made the films) began publishing a number of men's adventure series under its now-defunct "Men of Action" line. One such series features the further adventures of Inspector Harry Callahan. The series was brought to an end when Eastwood decided to direct, produce, and star in a fourth Dirty Harry movie, Sudden Impact, which was released in December 1983.